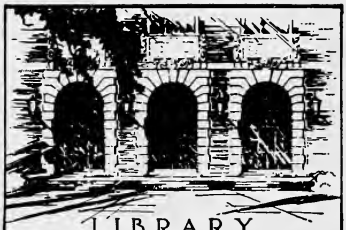

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A FALSE START.

A FALSE START.

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON," "FROM POST TO FINISH,"
"THE GREAT TONTINE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A FALSE START.

CHAPTER I.

A LITTLE DINNER.

Next week brought two things to Maurice Enderby: first, a jubilant letter from old John Madingley, enclosing a very handsome cheque on account of the "Champagnes," "and though," he added, "I was not there to see, and indeed never have seen the Wandering Nun run except that time at Goodwood, yet I am convinced she is the best I ever owned; let her only keep well and the Oaks is a moral certainty for her

next spring." The other letter was from Bob Grafton, and ran as follows:

"DEAR MAURICE,

"I am afraid you are about the most hopelessly ruined man of my acquaintance. A man who has only to sit still and see hundred-pound notes dropping into his lap is certain to deteriorate; he is bound to get out of the idea of ever earning his living in future. The filly is a clipper, and made a perfect show of her field on Tuesday. By the way, I met young Balders at Doncaster and he tells me that you are about to leave Tunnleton. What does that mean? Are you tired of it or has the petulant little place tired of you? When we cast out from its bosom your most virulent foe—Richard Madingley—if that really is his name—I thought that Tunnleton would be bound to acknowledge its obligation to you. Do you know I saw that precious young

scoundrel in the outer ring on the Leger day; he was in close conference with Pick and one or two more of the same kidney; you may depend upon it he is a regular hanger-on of the turf: I don't mean of the jackal species, but he has no more right to the social status he assumed in Tunnleton than he probably has to the name of Richard Madingley. I shall be glad to hear about why you are leaving Tunnleton, also what are your intended movements. I presume you are in search of a fresh curacy, or can it be possible that you have made up your mind to resign the profession? Kindest regards to Mrs. Enderby, and tell her her pretty turn-out requires no outriders, though I admit the Wandering Nun is enough to tempt her fortunate owners into the most profuse expenditure.

"Ever yours,

"Robert Grafton."

As he finished the letter Maurice could not help thinking that perhaps the one good thing he had done at Tunnleton was compelling Richard Madingley to leave the place, and so saving Edith Molecombe from rushing on her fate. He little dreamt of how, if chance had not intervened, his efforts would have been unavailing, and that, but for a valued client of her father's having proved rather long-winded, Edith would have been the partner of Dick Madingley's compulsory retreat. The person who not a little astonished Maurice at this juncture was Mr. Molecombe; the banker had called upon the Enderbys at the instigation of his partner, Frank Chylton, when they first made their appearance in Tunnleton, and when the rumours to Maurice's discredit arose there could be no doubt that he rather dropped them. He did not take a rabid view of Maurice's conduct like

General Praun, and thought, probably, that report considerably exaggerated his misdoings, but he did think that Mr. Enderby was not exactly an acquaintance to cultivate. He was cautious and civil enough when they met, but he no longer asked the Enderbys to his house. Now a reaction had arisen in his mind; he knew that Maurice was *bonâ fide* John Madingley's nephew by marriage, just as he knew that Dick was an impostor. Very sore about the somewhat ridiculous position he had been placed in, he had a sort of hazy idea that he owed reparation to the right man; he felt that he had been swayed very much in his judgment by Richard Madingley, and, being a tolerably clear-sighted man, thought that Maurice had perhaps had hard justice dealt out to him. Mr. Jarrow, for instance, would hardly have taken his curate's part without being satisfied that the allegations

against him were untrue; as for this last scandal, he had taken the trouble to make a few inquiries concerning it, and easily ascertained that "frequenting" meant that he had been once seen coming out of "The Spotted Dog." As Mr. Molecombe remarked to himself, "A gentleman don't live close upon a twelvemonth in a place like Tunnleton without the fact of his frequenting public-houses being known."

Maurice, unable to think of any other reason for the banker's increased cordiality, at last attributed it to the satisfactory balance standing to his account, still, he was rather taken aback at Bessie's getting a note from Mrs. Molecombe asking them to waive ceremony and come and dine in a friendly way.

There are wheels within wheels even in an invitation to dinner; and the conceit would be taken out of a good many of us

could we know the real reason why we are bidden to the feast. We should be astonished to find how rarely it is for our own sakes. It was quite true that Mr. Molecombe was disposed to be much more cordial to the Enderbys than he had been, but for this invitation they were indebted in a great measure to his daughter. Edith Molecombe was much depressed about the tangle of her love affair. That she was very earnest in her love for Dick Madingley was evinced by her consenting to elope with him. She had heard nothing of him since that brief peremptory whisper in Tunnleton Station when he had slipped her ticket into her hand. She had heard—it is difficult to say quite how, but young ladies in Edith's situation do contrive to get news of their truant lovers in marvellous fashion—that Mr. Enderby and a strange gentleman had called upon Richard Madingley only a day

or two before his departure. Now Edith Molecombe knew very well that Maurice was no friend of Dick Madingley; she knew, on the contrary, that the Enderbys had been rather pointedly excluded from the two or three garden-parties Dick had given. It was therefore, decidedly, not as a friend that Maurice would call there. She fretted dreadfully over this mysterious silence on the part of her lover; he must have seen her father at the station, and have understood why she had to abandon their scheme. She was unable to write to him, as she did not know his address; but he, if he chose, could have no difficulty in letting her hear from him. Whatever Mr. Enderby's business might have been, it was possible that it might throw some light upon her lover's silence. In the course of the evening, she thought, she should have no difficulty in questioning Maurice on this point.

The Enderbys, at Maurice's instigation, accepted the invitation. He was quite as curious to have some conversation with Edith Molecombe as she was with him. He knew her but slightly, and had taken no particular interest in her till the events of the last few days had brought her so prominently to his notice.

The only people asked to meet them were the Chyltons. These acted as a sort of connecting link between the Enderbys and their host, and, as the banker kept an undeniable cook, the little dinner passed off gaily. A regret was expressed at the coming departure of Maurice and his wife, but the subject was not unduly dwelt upon. Richard Madingley and his misdemeanours were naturally not alluded to; and, in short, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, everything had gone off most sociably and pleasantly. Mr. Molecombe

was no niggard, he thoroughly enjoyed entertaining, and, though he would have been puzzled to explain what had induced him to give this little banquet, yet he had got on very well with Maurice, and had come to the conclusion that gentleman was a very good fellow. Taking up his favourite position on the hearthrug, Mr. Molecombe rather confused Mrs. Chylton and Mrs. Enderby by favouring them with his views on the political state of the country, while Edith carried Maurice off to a distant table to look over photographs. She was a young lady of considerable determination, and lost no time in broaching the subject that was nearest her heart.

"Mr. Enderby," she said in a low voice, "I have one question to ask you. Will you answer it?"

"If it really is only one question," rejoined Maurice, smiling, "I think I might

say yes; but one question is very apt to lead to a string."

"Why did you call upon Mr. Madingley last week? He was no friend of yours surely?"

"Certainly not," said Maurice, "I called to see him on business."

"That is no answer," replied the girl quickly, "what business?"

"That is another question, and I must think a moment before I answer it."

There was a pause of several seconds, and then Maurice continued—

"I am not sure that it would be fair to tell you that. Like everybody else in Tunnleton, I am of course aware of the relation in which you lately stood to him. I should be exceedingly sorry to say anything that might hurt your feelings, and therefore, if you please, we will leave the subject where it is."

"No, no," she said quickly, "tell me all; whether for good or evil I have a right to know what men say concerning him."

Again Maurice hesitated for some little time. At last he answered slowly, "Perhaps you are right, you ought to know. If I give you pain forgive me. At any rate I will be brief. I saw Richard Madingley, in company with a friend of mine, to inform him that he was down here under false colours, and that it was my duty to unmask him before all Tunnleton, unless he thought proper to avoid such scandal by leaving the place in forty-eight hours."

"And what induced you to tell such a lie as that?" said Edith, with quivering lips.

"I had tolerable proof of what I asserted, and that Mr. Madingley thought there was some truth in it was proved by his accepting my terms and leaving Tunnleton within the time specified. We will drop the

subject now, if you please, Miss Molecombe, but you may rest assured of one thing, that Mr. Richard Madingley is not at all what he passed for in Tunnleton, and that it is extremely doubtful whether that is even his name." And with that Maurice rose from his chair with a hint that perhaps they had better join the circle.

"You don't quite like the idea, Bessie, of my giving up the Church," said Maurice as he drove his wife home; "but do you know the three friends I have mentioned it to have not uttered a syllable of remonstrance. General Shrewster and Grafton, on the contrary, clearly think I am right in doing so; while as for dear old Frank Chylton, he has clearly regarded me as a square peg in a round hole ever since I have been here."

"You know best, Maurice, still I confess

to a feeling that it is too late for you to turn back now."

"You forget that I am only in the novitiate, and not as yet actually elected to the ministry."

Bessie said no more, but she still had her doubts as to whether her husband would be right in doing this thing.

Edith Molecombe retired to her own room as soon as the visitors had left; but it was very late that night before she sought her pillow. She had had her interview with Maurice Enderby, and for the first time unbelief in her lover sprang up in her mind. She had been very much impressed by Maurice's manner; unlike her father he had hesitated at speaking at all about Richard Madingley; when he did speak it was in the quiet, resolute tones of a man confident of his assertions and of his power to prove them. He had passed over her insult, and

Edith's face blushed even now as she thought how very rude she had been to him in her own home. Careless of that, he had been only anxious to warn her that her lover was not what he represented himself to be, and to caution her against trusting in his words. That said he had evidently no wish to touch further on the subject. Could it be so? Was it the old story? Had she also set up for herself a false idol and fallen down and worshipped? She had refused to believe her father, she had refused to believe all stories to Dick Madingley's detriment that reached her ears; but Maurice Enderby had cast doubts into her mind, and for the first time she felt that it was well her future was yet in her own hands.

Generals Maddox and Praun were much exercised in their minds when they met upon the Promenade the morning after the banker's little dinner. To have given a

stranger a mutton-chop in Tunnleton unknown to the community would have been difficult. Mr. Molecombe's entertainment, it need scarcely be said, was already talked about.

"I really am surprised at Molecombe," said General Maddox. "Think of a respectable man like him entertaining a dissolute young man like Enderby, a perfect scandal to his cloth. Upon my honour, I don't know what society is coming to."

"Shameful! disgraceful! I call it," replied General Praun, angrily. "That is where it is, sir; the plutocracy is playing the very devil with the country. Molecombe is a man of business; Molecombe is a mammon worshipper. What does Molecombe care about a man's private character as long as he keeps a good swinging balance at his bank? What does he care, sir? answer me that;" and General Praun inflicted

sundry severe punches on the flags at his feet, as if exhorting the very stones to rise and bear testimony on his behalf. "I tell you what, Maddox," he continued, lowering his tone, "if Beelzebub's account stood at over four figures, it's my impression Molecombe would ask him to dinner!"

General Maddox shook his head solemnly, and said gently, "Too true, I am afraid; but Molecombe will live to discover that a gambler's account is liable to considerable fluctuations;" and with this exchange of amiable sentiments the two veterans separated.

CHAPTER II.

RIPE FOR TEMPTATION.

Autumn, with all the glories of its dying tints, has departed, a few last lingering leaves have fluttered lifeless to the ground; hedge and tree stand stark and bare, grimly defying the chill embrace of winter which now threatens them. The markets are glutted with pheasants; the Christmas turkey and the Christmas holly are already shadowed on the horizon, and the Christmas bills, more surely to be depended upon than

either turkey or sausages, loom imminent in the near futurity. The Enderbys have paid their farewell calls, have wished their friends good-bye, have shaken the dust of Tunnleton from their feet, and left their characters behind them. Much debate about these latter still raging in Tunnleton, for General Shrewster and Frank Chylton have both now spoken out and narrated the singular story of John Madingley's wedding present. It is known now how the Enderbys suddenly became possessed of such command of money; it is known now what induced Maurice's strange interest in the turf; it is known now what was the cause of that visit to "The Spotted Dog," which had so scandalized Tunnleton; and all but the most bigoted and obstinate of its inhabitants are fain to admit that under similar circumstances they would have acted much as Maurice did. A strong reaction

has set in in favour of the Enderbys, while Mr. Richard Madingley's reputation is drowning in the backwater of public opinion. Mr. Molecombe especially is full of regret that he did not sooner recognise the curate's good qualities. The rector makes himself peculiarly offensive to Maurice's opponents, by alluding to him as "that excellent and talented young man, who an obstinate faction literally hounded out of Tunnleton." General Shrewster cuttingly remarks that those who had condemned Maurice Enderby and believed in Richard Madingley had shown they did not know a gentleman when they saw him, and had exhibited much want of tolerance in their judgment.

General Maddox, finding the storm run high, and that he had been somewhat mistaken in his estimate of Maurice's iniquities, thought it expedient to leave Tunnleton for

a temporary change of air, but the irascible Praun stood manfully to his guns, and declared that, if Enderby had not yet been guilty of the charges brought against him, he inevitably would be before he had done; that the thirst for gambling was implanted in his veins; that they might tell this tale of a wedding present to the marines; that if Mr. Enderby had not bet as yet, which he didn't believe, they would very soon hear of his transacting business in that respect, that is if they ever did hear of him again; that Mrs. Enderby had exhibited her fiendish temper when spoken to in her own interest by two of her best friends; that those who lived would see. And then the general faded out of the club billiard-room with a rumbling chorus of expletives suggestive of service seen with that famous army of Flanders. On the subject of Dick Madingley, the general prudently refrained from expressing

any opinion. He had his own misgivings concerning that gentleman, and remembered regretfully that he had constituted himself one of his principal supporters in Tunnleton.

The Enderbys meanwhile had established themselves in comfortable lodgings in the Hyde Park district, and Maurice was turning over in his mind what calling he had better embrace. Thanks to the successes of the "Wandering Nun," he had a very comfortable balance at his banker's, and this would give him time to look around. For some time the Bar commended itself to his attention, but the beginning of that profession was cast among rather stony places, and at the best some time must elapse before he could expect to make even a slender income at it. Many young barristers at the outset of their career supplemented their business with their pens. This Maurice had commenced trying to do at Tunnleton, and still continued in

London, but, though it had been attended latterly with some little success, it certainly did not at present promise to swell to a regular income. And yet for the life of him beyond the Church and the Bar he could see no other profession open to him; medicine required special training, and for the army and navy he was too old for admission. It must not be thought that Maurice was lounging about town in a happy Micawber state of mind waiting for something to turn up; he was strenuously seeking for the "something" himself; but it is not quite so easy at six-and-twenty to find an opening. However, after some weeks' reflection, he attained the first great step. He made up his mind what it was he wanted, and there is much in that. It was true his choice fell on what he believed to be utterly out of his reach; but the apparently unattainable is sometimes achieved by dogged perseverance.

He would be a soldier if he could; and he decided that he could do no better than write to consult General Shrewster on that point.

General Shrewster's answer speedily arrived; he would do his best, and was willing to seize every opportunity; but he pointed out that Maurice's age precluded his getting into the army by any of the regular channels. "Your only chance, my dear Enderby, of joining the profession is by a by-path; they don't stand much of it in these days; still, a commission is got now and again in that way. You must wait for a war of some kind, and with our magnificent and extensive empire the luxury of a small war is a thing we are rarely without for many months together. You must then go to the authorities, and volunteer to go out in any capacity. You will be handsomely snubbed no doubt; never mind that. Your case becomes my business then, and I shall hope

that I may have influence sufficient to induce some one employed to take you on his staff, in of course an unacknowledged capacity; then we must trust to the chapter of accidents. If you get a chance of distinguishing yourself, or do good service in the field, your chief may recommend you for a commission, and we must endeavour all we know then to get you appointed to a regiment. You will be beginning late, but if luck favours you with plenty of fighting you may easily make up for a bad start. An old friend of mine was six years an ensign in an infantry regiment, but nevertheless was a Colonel of Dragoons at the end of eleven years. May fortune be as favourable to you when we get you started.

"With kindest regards to Mrs. Enderby,

"Believe me,

"Ever yours,

"JAMES SHREWSTER.'

This letter gave much encouragement to Maurice. From that out he began to take much interest in the proceedings of our missionaries, who are the cause perhaps of more of our petty wars than anybody else. That matter of religion has been productive of bitter feeling since the world began, and the desire of the one man to arbitrarily substitute his own creed for that of his neighbours, the cause of much heartburning exasperation. Strengthened by Shrewster's counsels, Maurice gave up the thought of seeking other employment. He read the papers carefully, more especially the Indian news, but the winter glided away, and England seemed as far from an embroglio as ever. It was unfortunate, but an unnatural tranquillity seemed suddenly to have settled over the restless area of the British Empire. Of the numberless races which acknowledge the sway of England, not one at present

showed signs of irritability, Maurice even wrote a letter to General Shrewster, complaining of the stagnation in the trade of wholesale murder. The veteran could not help smiling upon receiving his *protégé's* letter, "such a rapid conversion," he murmured, "was never seen. Most decidedly, he was not in his right vocation here." But he wrote a few lines to Maurice and told him not to trouble himself, for that England was very seldom long without a small war on her hands; that in the meantime he was in the right place both for obtaining the earliest information and for making the earliest application for employment; and further promising to come himself to town directly he saw a chance of forwarding his (Maurice's) interests.

But as winter merged into early spring in his search through the papers Maurice found himself constantly confronted with the bet-

ting on the spring handicaps, and as the weeks slipped by the betting on the Two Thousand and Derby became added to the prize-list. The old infatuation once more took possession of him, although the Wandering Nun was engaged in none of these races, but in watching the returns of last year's sport Maurice had acquired a general knowledge of the running of most of the more prominent horses on the turf, and had noted the vicissitudes of their various careers with the keenest interest. Once more he began speculating in his own mind on their chances, and picking out what he conceived ought to be the winners of these races, not that he had the slightest intention of backing them, but simply with a view of seeing whether his judgment would prove to be correct. Once or twice that solemn warning which Shrewster had given him crossed his mind, but there was little cause to feel afraid of

trouble accruing to him in that wise at present. It was true, racing had begun again, and besides the Lincolnshire handicap many another big stake had been fought out in the Midlands; but he never went near these battlefields, and contented himself with reading what had happened in the daily papers.

But when a man is ripe for temptation it is odds that his bad angel speedily offers him the opportunity to indulge his weakness. As Maurice was strolling down Oxford Street one morning he ran across his friend Bob Grafton.

"I didn't know that you were back in town," said Maurice as they shook hands.

"Well, yes," replied Grafton; "it was getting high time to get back to the dear old wilderness of bricks and mortar. The hunting is about played out, at all events my two or three screws are, and the country

is no good for the next five months. I'll tell you what we'll do—there can't be any harm in it now, you know—we'll go down next week and see the City and Suburban run. You cannot help taking some interest in racing as half-proprietor of the crack three-year-old of the season, and the Epsom handicap is a pretty race to see."

Now Maurice had vowed to himself that he would not do this thing; that though he could not help watching racing he would not go near it; but then that was while General Shrewster's word of warning still rang in his ears. That was some time ago now; it was all nonsense; he could look on and enjoy the sport without betting, and, after a moment's hesitation, he yielded to Grafton's persuasions and agreed to accompany him to Epsom on the following Wednesday, and, this settled, the two friends separated for the present.

Maurice had, of course, seen big races run before, but for a young man with a strong taste for horses and hunting racing had, so far, interested him singularly little; it was easily explained: he had, till the last year, never made any study of it, he barely knew the names of even the prominent equine celebrities, he had no knowledge of the colours of the owners; consequently a race to him so far had been like the flashing of a kaleidoscope, and even when the numbers were hoisted the names of the placed horses interested him but little. Now it was different; while at Tunnleton he had surreptitiously studied the calendar attentively and learnt the colours of prominent owners by heart, and he was looking forward with considerable excitement to visiting a race-course under different auspices and accompanied by such a capable mentor as Grafton.

Bob was true to his tryst at Victoria Station.

"Glorious day," he said, as they stepped into a railway carriage; "bright, clear, and no chance of rain; but your top coat is hardly thick enough, it will be nipping on the Downs, you may depend upon it," and Bob glanced down with much satisfaction at the bulky ulster in which he was himself encased. "I'll tell you what, too," he continued: "I've got a rare hint about the City and Suburban, and we'll see what we can do with it when we get to the course."

Two or three strangers now got into the carriage, and Grafton at once dropped the subject and never opened his lips about it again till they found themselves on the lawn at Epsom, just outside the gate leading into Tattersall's ring.

"Now you wait outside for me while I

go in and see what's doing," and then Bob slipped through the jealously-guarded portals of that inner enclosure.

Maurice lingered where he had been left, and, though it was some little time before Grafton returned, yet he found himself thoroughly amused; he fell across three or four old college friends and chatted pleasantly with them, and each of them at parting gave him a different tip for the big race. Maurice's own predilections ran in favour of a three-year-old called Wolfgang, a prominent favourite with the public, and he was wondering whether Grafton would coincide with him in that opinion, and getting slightly tired of the monotonous question "Do you want to do anything, sir?" or the slightly varied formula of "Want to back one, sir?" when Grafton touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"It's all right, old man, I've got a rare

good price. Twenty to one to a pony is rather a nice bet if it comes off. I met Jack Danby at dinner last night, and he told me that all their stable are going for old Drumhead. The public don't fancy him a bit; they think he's got too much weight, but he says the old horse is wonderfully well just now, has won a rare good trial, and is sure to be there or thereabouts at the finish. Now, Maurice, you shall be in a fiver with me. You must have a bet, you know; you can't come down and see the City and Suburban without having a trifle on it, and, win or lose, I'm sure old Drumhead will give you a good show for your money. And now let's come up to our stalls and see the race."

CHAPTER III.

EPSOM DOWNS.

They reached their seats in very good time, and Maurice mentioned to his friend his own partiality for Wolfgang, who, as he pointed out, was very well in the handicap.

"That's just what it is," replied Grafton, "he is rather too well in. He's rather a headstrong horse, and wants a man to ride him. A big colt of that kind, to my thinking, always runs better when not so lightly weighted, for the simple reason the boys

can't hold him. However we shall soon see all about it now; here they come."

And in threes and fours the competitors paced slowly past the stand.

"It is a large field," remarked Grafton, "and a horse wants to be lucky as well as good to win to-day; the starter will very likely have a job to get them off. Twenty-nine of them altogether. There goes Drumhead, Maurice, with the black jacket and crimson sleeves," and Grafton pointed to a big brown horse that was pacing soberly up the course on the far side. Another few minutes and the cavalcade came striding back once more past the stand in their preliminary canter.

"Here comes Wolfgang," cried Grafton, "the blue and white chevrons in the centre. Now do you see what I mean? He's a splendid mover, but look how he is tearing at his bit, it's as much as the boy can do to

hold him now, and it's a chance whether he won't lose control over him in the actual race."

"Yes," laughed Maurice, "in a hunting-field I should say it was odds that a beggar like that spread-eagled the pack. But here comes Drumhead, a very sober, business-like gentleman that."

"Yes," said Grafton, drily, "he is a veteran of five seasons, and knows better than to go using up himself and his jockey in that fashion. But isn't he a rare goer? Look at his long easy stride, and then he has such power. A few pounds more don't make much difference to him. Ah! Hampton, how are you?" continued Grafton, as he nodded to a wiry red-haired man, who, in an ulster and a pot-hat, had just entered an adjoining stall. "What are they doing below?"

"Golden Dream is strong as brandy.

His party are very confident, more confident than they have any right to be in such a big field. Five to one is hard to get against him now; but there's lots of 'em backed."

"What do you fancy yourself?" inquired Bob.

"Well, you see, Mr. Grafton," replied the bookmaker, "it's not quite my business to have fancies, but I think old Drumhead will run well, and I've kept Flycatcher to run for the book. His people think he'll give a good account of himself."

"It must be a good betting race."

"Very fair, sir," replied Hampton, "very fair. It won't hurt any of us much. But I always like to go for the gloves when I have a chance, and keep one."

"They are down at the post now," said Maurice, "and some of them appear very fractious."

Grafton looked steadily through his glass

at the cluster of silken jackets grouped in the starter's charge. "Yes," he said, "there are three or four of them giving trouble. They're off!" he cried, and the shout was re-echoed from many a throat, only to be followed by a cry of "No, no! false start!" while some half-dozen horses were seen streaming to the top of the hill.

"That's bad for Wolfgang," continued Grafton, "it is as I thought, he's got away with the boy, like two or three more."

Wolfgang, indeed, proved more insubordinate than his companions, and reached the top of the hill before his jockey succeeded in pulling him up. It would be tedious to dwell upon the numerous false starts that took place—as is not uncommonly the case when there is a large number of competitors, and the field comprises three or four fractious youngsters. The bad manners of these sinners are infectious and make even

elderly and well-disposed horses forget themselves. Suffice it to say that the backers of Wolfgang and Golden Dream passed a very bad three-quarters-of-an-hour. False start succeeded false start, and upon pretty nearly every occasion Wolfgang and Golden Dream were nearly at the top of the hill before they could be stopped. Latterly Flycatcher, who had been very well behaved during the first part of the proceedings, began to exhibit signs of temper, and even Drumhead and his experienced pilot began to manifest anxiety to be off. At last the welcome roar of "They're off!" was followed by no counter-cry of "False start!" and, with a sense of relief, the crowd saw the cluster of silken jackets stream up the hill and come sweeping through the furzes. If the backers of the two principal offenders had looked askance at the erratic proceedings of their favourites during the last forty minutes the

supporters of Golden Dream had good right to be disgusted with that animal now. After being pretty well first away in every one of the previous "no goes" he had distinguished himself by getting off very badly when the flag fell in earnest. Wolfgang, on the contrary, proved eager to begin till the last, and, coming through the furzes, assumed the command; he must have been a good colt, in rare condition, for, notwithstanding all his breaks away, and that he had as good as taken a race out of himself before starting, he led his field a cracker till half-way down the hill, leading to Tattenham Corner, when Fly-catcher ran up to him, and, getting the inside berth round the famous turn, deprived him of the lead. By this time the scattering of the field was amazing; such tailing had rarely been witnessed, and, out of the twenty-nine who left the starter's hands

not two minutes before, there were certainly little more than half-a-dozen left in the race.

At the road Flycatcher was still leading, with Wolfgang lying second. Then came three or four all in a cluster, and barely a couple of lengths behind; while stealing up on the rails, inch by inch, was old Drumhead, whose jockey, watching the leaders keenly as a hawk, already felt victory within his grasp. At the distance Wolfgang was done with, and Flycatcher came on with a lead of two lengths. Half-way up, there were only three left, and a cry of "Come on, Flycatcher," burst from the excited throats of his immediate partisans. At the "Bell" one of the three competitors compounded, while Drumhead rapidly closed with his opponent. Flycatcher's jockey cast an anxious look right and left, and became aware that on his near side the most dangerous horseman that ever steered

thoroughbred over Epsom Downs was at his quarters. He had ridden steadily and with judgment up to this, now he lost his nerve, and, anxious to get home, sat down opposite the stand and commenced riding his horse in earnest. His grim opponent smiled as he found, despite his jockey's efforts, Flycatcher could not improve the half-length he held. Then he too began, and driving the old horse all he knew, landed him a clever winner by a good neck.

"A fine shave, Hampton, either way," cried Grafton; "and from here I can't be very sure, but I fancy Drumhead got up in time."

"Not a doubt about it, sir," replied the bookmaker; "if I wasn't sure myself the silence down below would tell me. Flycatcher would have been a clean haul for most of them, but few, I fancy, missed laying Drumhead any more than I did."

"Now, Maurice, we can go down and look after some lunch comfortably. I've collared four, and you are one hundred in, old boy."

Maurice said nothing, but he could not help reflecting that his determination not to bet had been promptly dissipated. It would be absurd to suppose that he felt penitent or uncomfortable about it, for winning a hundred pounds on a bright breezy April afternoon never oppressed any body within my recollection. He had not meant to do it, and, great as his excitement had been over the race, he had honestly never thought of the bet he had upon it. His interest had been absorbed, first in the bold front shown by his own selection, Wolfgang, for so great a part of the distance, then in the sudden advent of Fly-catcher, the bookmaker's tip, and lastly, in the triumph of his friend Bob Grafton's

favourite, Drumhead. It was some time before they could make their way down-stairs, for the crowd were, like themselves, hunger-stricken, and the staircases of the grand stand are by no means broad and stately. Mr. Hampton was jammed up with them on the way down, and, slightly to Maurice's surprise, Grafton insisted on his coming to luncheon with them. The beauty of the hunting-field, quoth Mr. Punch, is that it enables all classes to mix, but for purposes of amalgamation the hunting-field in that matter cannot be compared with the race-course. At length they made their way into the chief refreshment saloon, where Grafton at once ordered everything, including a couple of bottles of champagne. Everything, as he explained, simply meant such food as the hurried waiters could lay their hands upon; while, as for the liquor, "we can only hope it may be drinkable."

Mr. Hampton ate with all the equanimity and rapidity characteristic of his class. They are perfectly used to the losing and winning of money, and as convinced as the proprietors of Monte Carlo that they must win in the long-run, but of time for revelry they are aware they have little during business hours. Mr. Hampton was not long finishing his lunch and tumbler of champagne, and then announced that he must be once more "up and doing." Grafton and Maurice lingered some little time longer.

"I don't care much about the minor races here," said Bob. "We've seen the big event, and, after we've had a stroll through the paddock, I'm good to get back to town again as soon as you like. Sure to see a lot of fellows there, you know, who can tell us all about the race, and sure too to encounter several others who always said

old Drumhead would win, but who for varied reasons never backed him."

Maurice returned to town in excellent spirits, and, having thoroughly enjoyed his day I'm afraid felt but small compunctions concerning that profitable wager that he had allowed himself to be led into. He had no intention of taking to betting, but this was just an odd instance that wouldn't occur again, and as for enjoying a day's racing occasionally it was quite possible to do that without gambling; and, now he had determined to lay aside his sacred calling, there would be no shocking of people's prejudices on that account. From this out he paid as much attention to turf news as if he had been a declared votary of the sport; and as the Epsom carnival drew near Maurice got deeply interested in the probable results. He had not been on a race-course since the triumph of Drumhead, but he had made up

his mind to see the Derby, and more especially the Oaks, run for. The Wandering Nun had made a successful *début* at Newmarket, and carried off the Thousand Guineas in a canter, and racing men were pretty nearly unanimously of opinion that the ladies' race at Epsom was at her mercy provided she kept well.

The last week in May saw Maurice accompanied by his friend Grafton once again on the Epsom lawn. He had been down on the Derby day and had been persuaded by Bob to have ten pounds on the winner of that race. Between that and his half of the stakes for the Thousand Guineas his balance at his banker's waxed fat, and Maurice, ever sanguine, looked upon the success of the Wandering Nun this afternoon as a foregone conclusion. Grafton had left him to see what was doing in the inner ring, which Maurice, not being a member of Tattersall's,

was, of course, unable to enter. Suddenly his attention was arrested by a voice he thought he recognised vociferating, "The 'Wandering Nun,' I'll lay against, here's four to one the 'Wandering Nun.'" Looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded he at once recognised Hampton just the other side the railings which divided the Tattersall enclosure from the Lawn. It flashed through Maurice's mind that this was a chance. The last quotation he had heard against the favourite for the Oaks had been five to two. Leaning over the rails he touched the bookmaker with his umbrella and said, "I'll take fours, Mr. Hampton."

"Very well, sir. What shall it be in? Will you have it in ponies?"

"No," exclaimed Maurice, "I want four hundred to a hundred; will you lay it?"

"Certainly," replied the bookmaker. "Let's see—Mr. Enby, isn't it?"

"No, that's not quite right," replied Maurice—"*Enderby*. You met me with Mr. Grafton at the Spring Meeting. You may remember."

"Certainly," replied the bookmaker, who, like most of his class, had a good memory for faces, and then, having made a rapid note of the transaction, he turned round and once more vociferated his war-cry.

Some little time after Grafton re-joined him, and Maurice at once informed him of what he had done.

"Backed it for a hundred?" said Grafton. "The deuce you have. Surely, your share of the stakes should be good enough for you, and I'll tell you what: I'm very much afraid it isn't coming off this time. I've not been able to catch anybody who can tell me anything about it; but there's a screw loose about the 'Wandering Nun.' Those fellows in there lay as if they knew something,

and I saw one or two good judges very busy covering their money. It's not a very healthy sign when the odds against a favourite expand just before the race."

As they made their way to the coign of vantage, from which they meant to view the race, two men who were ascending the stairs just before them enlightened their minds on the subject. "No, the 'Wandering Nun' won't win; she is not even first favourite just now. All the better for us. With her out of the way Belladonna ought to be about good enough."

"Have you heard what's the matter with the 'Nun'?"

"Gone slightly amiss at the eleventh hour, I fancy, as these fillies will sometimes out of sheer perversity. Some of them seem to have got a hint of it in the enclosure, for Hampton, Weston, and two or three more of

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the most deadly pencillers out, have never ceased betting against her all the morning."

"Pleasant news," said Maurice, with a smile, "however, I can afford to forgive her if any one can."

The race for the Oaks was devoid of all interest as far as Maurice's champion was concerned; from the fall of the flag the "Wandering Nun" either could not or would not go near her horses. She never looked dangerous from first to last, and finished an indifferent sixth in a field of ten runners. Belladonna and Tamarinde fought out a rattling race, which terminated in favour of the latter by half a length.

"She is not herself, and showed temper to boot, but that running is too bad to be true, and the 'Wandering Nun' will win you a hat-full of money yet, old fellow, before she has done," remarked Grafton.

CHAPTER IV.

EDITH GETS OVER IT.

All great gatherings of the people are remarkable for one thing, to wit, those whom you wish to see you never meet, whilst those whom you would rather did not see you there, do. Your puritanical uncle, from whom you had expectations, who regards racing as the acme of iniquity, is sure to hear that you graced the Derby with your presence. Your spinster aunt, who has strong and intolerant feelings about the scarlet lady of Babylon, is

certain to be informed of your attendance at any High Church temple of worship. You cannot as a rule join in any celebration which your dear relatives consider unfitting without its speedily coming to their ears. Our sins have a greater tendency to make themselves heard of than our good deeds. Maurice was most assuredly not thinking of Tunnleton during the Epsom week, but there were Tunnleton men there who saw him, and a large section of Tunnleton is even now bewailing his backslidings and misfortunes.

It is all very well, said Tunnleton, for General Shrewster and one or two more to express their belief in Mr. Enderby's innocence of the accusations laid against him, but "what was he doing at Epsom? Answer me that," demanded General Praun, fiercely; "I am told too that he has lost a very large sum of money."

As Maurice was now currently known to be the nephew of the owner of the "Wandering Nun," the defeat of that animal would naturally give rise to some such rumour in the little town, and it was upon that report that the latter part of Genaral Praun's statement was founded. As for Maurice he troubled himself little about Tunnleton's opinion. He had received his first rebuff on a race-course. He had made so sure of the Wandering Nun's victory that he felt very much as if he had lost a large sum of money, but General Shrewster had gauged him pretty accurately, he was just the man of which bold and daring bettors are made. He was not in the least depressed at his defeat, but simply keen and sanguine to recover his losses. His successes had been so unbroken, for every victory of Uncle John's flying filly had been practically a success for him, that he must have been a

very craven to have been cast down by the first reverse. This was a quiet week, but next came Ascot, and there Maurice had made up his mind to plunge into the thick of the fray. Even Bessie, though very far from intending it, confirmed him in his resolution. He had mentioned neither his little bet on the Spring Handicap nor his big one on the Oaks, but, like himself, in spite of all her prudent resolutions, she had gradually come to look on Uncle John's racing successes as a welcome contribution to their income, and this last would have been such a grand prize. Such a sum as two thousand pounds odd, which she had come to regard as sure to fall into their hands, was bitter disappointment to be bereft of, and she more than once laughingly expressed such disappointment to her husband.

"Never mind," he rejoined, "our good fairy has one or two engagements at Ascot,

and we must hope that next week will find her restored to health. The sporting papers all say it was merely a temporary ailment."

"You won't go down, Maurice, will you?" she inquired, a little anxiously.

"Oh, yes I shall," he replied. "It's no distance, and I thoroughly enjoy the sport."

"I am afraid Tunnleton will be more convinced than ever that you bet, if they hear of you at all these race-courses," said Bessie, with a smile.

"And with some justice at last," thought Maurice. "Nonsense!" he said. "What's Tunnleton to me, or me to Tunnleton? Bar the Chyltons and Shrewster, I think we have left no friends behind us there."

"Well, I must say I liked the Molecombes, they were very civil to us at the last, and very anxious to make amends for having lent too credulous an ear to that precious impostor Richard Madingley. By the way

I had a letter from Edith this morning, and, what is more, it contains a mysterious message to you. She desires her kindest regards, hopes you will forgive her being so rude to you, and bids me say that she bears what you told her constantly in mind; and now, Maurice," cried Bessie quickly, "what did you tell her?"

"A mere nothing; only gave her my opinion regarding Richard Madingley, which she naturally refused to believe true. I am very glad to see that she at all events thinks that I may be right after all."

"She talks of coming up to town in the course of next week, when she hopes to see us."

There was one person who shook his head, though not so noisily as General Praun, yet much more seriously, over Maurice's proceedings. It so happened that General Shrewster had heard of Maurice's

presence at the Spring Meeting, and he feared that his prediction was about to be realized.

"It will be the ruin of him, that life in London," he muttered, "with any amount of racing going on all round him. He will begin attending all these meetings, and as for a man of his temperament not betting it is preposterous to think of. Ah! if there was only a chance of getting him into the service in some way. To pack him off to India, or rattle him out on service, would be the making of him just now, but I am afraid at his age there is no opening at present; odd, too, that we are not in a petty quarrel with somebody."

However, for a wonder, the country was not engaged in protecting its frontiers, punishing its feudatories, or annexing its neighbours, and soldiers had nothing for it but to regret the stagnation of their trade.

Mrs. Enderby was very pleased in the course of the week at receiving a visit from Edith Molecombe. That young lady was unfeignedly glad to find her hostess at home, and seemed still more pleased at discovering that Maurice was likely to be in later in the afternoon. She wanted very much to make friends with Mr. Enderby, who, she had taken it into her head, had a shrewd suspicion of her contemplated elopement, though she hardly anticipated the chance of saying much to him. As it turned out, when he did make his appearance, he was accompanied by his friend Mr. Grafton, and the conversation became, of course, general.

Grafton had never as yet set eyes upon Edith Molecombe, and, knowing her history as he did, looked upon her with no little curiosity. She was looking her best; the worry of her disappointment had imparted a

refinement to her features which they had hitherto lacked. She was a nice-looking girl, of medium height, and with a neat figure, which showed off her dainty muslin draperies to the utmost advantage; and, in spite of Miss Torkesly's remark that it was high time she got married, although past her majority, she was still a long way off being an irreclaimable spinster.

"Well worth interfering about," thought Grafton; "it would have been a sin that a nice ladylike girl like that should have fallen into the hands of an unscrupulous blackleg."

In spite of his passion for sport of all description, Grafton was a man fond of ladies' society. He could drop all the shibboleth of the race-course in their presence, and, rarer faculty still, could refrain from chanting his prowess amid the turnips or in the hunting-field to their weary ears. He chatted away

to his hostess and Edith Molecombe about all the gossip of the day, and what was doing in town, in the liveliest fashion. Fancy-fairs, exhibitions, Royal patronages, Bob Grafton had attended them all and had a piquant anecdote to tell about many of them. He was a popular man, and sure of being heartily received at many a London tea-table could he only be entrapped thither. It was not till the last moment that Grafton alluded to the forth-coming Ascot, and then it was briefly to arrange with Maurice where they should meet, but that allusion produced results which Bob never dreamed of.

"How I should like to see Ascot!" exclaimed Miss Molecombe, "but the Millisons, with whom I am staying, say they cannot find any one to go halves in a box, and Mr. Millison declares that he cannot afford to take a whole one."

"And I have never seen Ascot," cried Bessie, "and really," she continued, with a slight toss of her head, "as I am never likely to be part proprietor of another race-horse, I ought to be allowed to see the 'Wandering Nun' for once. Can't you manage it, Maurice?"

"Of course he can, and must," replied Grafton, "the idea of a lady who owns the best three-year-old of the year not going down to see her mare run! How can you expect her to win, Mrs. Enderby, if you don't personally smile on her exertions?"

Maurice was rather in a dilemma; he did not want to take his wife down to Ascot, but, considering that all the money which had come to them by means of the "Wandering Nun" was virtually hers, it did seem rather ungracious to refuse her request, so after some little hesitation he yielded, and said

that if a box could be procured so late in the day he should be very glad to share one with Mr. Millison.

"Hold him to that, Mrs. Enderby, and never fear but what I'll find the box. It's of course a little late in the day, but there are always a few come in at the last moment belonging for the most part to regular tenants whom something suddenly prevents from attending," and with this Mr. Grafton made his adieux and departed.

"Do you think we shall get the box?" exclaimed Miss Molecombe, with eyes sparkling at the prospect of witnessing the, as yet, unknown glories of Ascot.

"I can only say the affair could not be in better hands. Grafton knows all sorts of people, and if the thing is to be managed he is the man to do it."

"Yes, Edith," said Mrs. Enderby, who

believed immensely in her husband's friend; "I don't think we shall be disappointed, so you may look out your best frocks."

"It will be delightful. I must run home now and tell Mr. Millison the good news; and Mr. Enderby," she continued, in a low voice, "I want to apologise for being so rude to you that night; from several things I have learnt lately I am afraid you have told me the truth. I don't want to say anything more on the subject, but you may be sure I shall not forget your warning. Good-bye."

"I think she has pretty well got over it," said Maurice when he had returned from seeing his visitor out.

"Yes; there is one thing that, once convinced of it, would help a proud girl like Edith Molecombe much in getting over a disappointment; her pride would be so

wounded at the thought of there being good reason to doubt her lover being a gentleman."

"Ah!" said Maurice, "I believe distraction is always recommended for these cases,"—he was still feeling a little annoyed at the idea of being saddled with ladies at Ascot—"I suppose Edith is just in the state described in the old song:

"From place to place they hurry me to banish my regret,
And when they win a smile from me they fancy I forget;"

and, as far as my experience goes, they are pretty well justified in doing so. I don't suppose, if it is a fine day and her dress fits, that we shall be wrong in supposing that Edith has forgotten."

"You needn't sneer in that way, Maurice; it would be rather odd if she hadn't. Don't you know that from the day Richard

Madingley left Tunnleton she has never even heard of him? That is about three-quarters of a year ago; I think most girls would have ceased to think about such a lover as hers was in that time."

"It would be very curious if it should be so, but do you know, Bessie, it's just possible that Edith might see her old lover at Ascot. I have never seen him myself during my few days' racing experience, but Grafton tells me that he has caught sight of him once or twice, and that whatever he might have been when he was at Tunnleton he has little doubt now that he is enrolled in the ranks of the ring."

"We will hope she won't," replied Bessie; "surely we shall not be mixed up with those sort of people?"

"No, but I saw at Epsom that some of the smaller bookmakers roamed about in

pursuit of their calling in front of the stand, and I daresay they do the same at Ascot; however, it is not very likely to happen, and, let Grafton only get us the box, no doubt we shall have a good time."

CHAPTER V.

A BLACK ASCOT.

NEVER was there greater promise of Queen's weather than the Ascot week held out for the royal meeting. No party on the Waterloo platform was in higher spirits than the Millisons and Enderbys. Old Millison was the head of a well-established broker's house on the Stock Exchange, and dearly loved a bit of racing now and then. A judicious douceur to the guard enabled them to obtain a compartment to themselves, and, fur-

nished with race-cards, the whole party were speedily engaged in speculation as to what would win the Queen's Vase. Even the ladies caught the enthusiasm, desired to be instructed, and expressed their intention of having a bet upon that race. And Grafton soon found himself invested with the office of the ladies' commissioner, while they themselves plunged into an animated discussion as to what extent their investments were to be carried. Miss Molecombe solemnly handed a five-pound note over to Grafton, which he was adjured to lay out to the best advantage. Mr. Millison deposited a similar stake on behalf of his wife, and then Maurice handed over a like sum on the part of Bessie. Mrs. Enderby was in a state of great excitement as to whether the "Wandering Nun" would run or not for the Queen's Vase. The mare was reported amongst the arrivals at Ascot, and was also coloured on the card.

But Grafton rather inclined to the belief that she would not start for that race.

"You see, Mrs. Enderby, the 'Wandering Nun' has two or three valuable engagements this week, and as she wasn't quite herself ten days ago it is probable they will keep her for something that is run over a less severe course than the Queen's Vase."

Now it had been arranged that the ladies should run down for the first day of the meeting and the Cup day. And now arose another problem for Grafton to solve. Mrs. Enderby was naturally excessively anxious to see this famous mare, of which she was half owner, run. Miss Molecombe was equally decided that above all things any race in which the "Wandering Nun" figured must be witnessed. But here came a little divergence of view; whereas Bessie and Mrs. Millison had only suggested a change of day if necessary, Edith thought that they had

better adhere to their original arrangement, and come down an extra day if circumstances required it. Racing might amuse Miss Molecombe, or it might not, but she had at all events made up her mind to thoroughly satisfy herself on this point.

At last Ascot station is reached, and, descending from their carriage, the party followed the throng, making their way up the narrow lane leading to the back of the stand. No sooner are the ladies comfortably installed in their box than Maurice and Grafton sally forth across the lawn towards the betting-ring to ascertain what is doing, leaving Mr. Millison to do *cicerone* and point out the humours of the course to the two neophytes. Their box was on the second tier, and looking down upon the crowd that thronged the lawn and race-course afforded ample amusement to Mrs. Enderby and Edith. With their glasses they could see

clearly the motley crowd on the far side drags covered with men whose appearance unmistakeably stamped them as wont to mingle in the clubs of St. James's and the drawing-rooms of Belgravia. Other drags there were in which the ladies looked quite as smartly dressed, but exhibited much want of that repose of manner which characterised their neighbours. The men too in these latter were remarkable for a brilliancy of attire, which, if not quite to be picked to pieces, gave a vague idea of not being exactly correct as a whole. There were the sable sons of minstrelsy, the tumblers, the gipsies, girls with the last music-hall songs, strong men, fire-eaters, card-sellers, and all the miscellaneous crowd that mingle in the throng of a big race-meeting. Although watching them from afar, Edith through her glasses could see quite well enough to be amused at the motley gathering. At

length a line of police marched steadily down the centre of the course, other mounted policemen accompanying them, and in an incredibly short space of time the broad green ribbon is cleared of the loungers, who but a few minutes since had crowded it. Another minute, and a ringing cheer some distance down the course announces that the royal *cortége* is close at hand, and immediately afterwards some half-dozen open carriages, with the Prince and Princess of Wales in the leading one, passed leisurely up the centre of the course, and deposited their contents at the door of the Royal Stand.

The sharp note of the saddling-bell is now heard, and a minute or two later the numbers go up for the Trial Stakes. There are are five runners, and, as is usually the case in this race, one of them is at once made a pretty hot favourite.

Grafton and Maurice hurry in at the last moment, and Bob informs the ladies that he has taken two to one against Marmaduke, for what he calls the Ladies' Betting Association, limited. That he has backed it himself, and fancies it should win. But the Trial Stakes, which inaugurates the meeting, is generally an uncertain race and wont to result in discomforture to the backers to start with. It follows its charter this afternoon, and our party see their horse beaten in a canter by a little-fancied outsider, about whom very long odds had been offered a few moments before; however, nobody recks much of the first reverse of a big meeting; there is plenty of time for us to recover from such petty disaster; and Grafton, as he laughed gaily and said, "Better luck next time," little dreamed of the scale upon which Maurice had commenced operations. Enderby had made up

his mind to bet in earnest for once, and had unluckily conceived a hazy notion of a system about backing horses. He did not know it, but the idea was as old as the hills, and had brought many a gallant backer to grief in his day. It was simply increasing your stakes after every rebuff, on the principle that your turn must come, and that when it does you will have recovered all your losses and a good deal besides. Maurice had lost fifty pounds upon this race, and had already determined to have a hundred on the next.

"Is my horse going to start, Mr. Grafton?" exclaimed Mrs. Enderby. "What have you heard about her in the ring?"

"No, you won't see her to-day; she is not to go for the Vase, but I hear she is to run on Thursday for the rich St. James's Palace Stakes. Not quite perhaps all the honour and glory of winning the Vase, but

a much richer prize, and if the 'Wandering Nun' is at all herself she should win without difficulty."

The Gold Vase, which immediately succeeded, terminated, as the prelude to luncheon always ought to do, in the triumph of the favourite, and a monetary success to the little party all round, and they adjourned to their cold lamb, lobster salad, and champagne, which Millison's servants had laid daintily out on the lawn at the back of the stand, in the highest of spirits. The stockbroker was a lover of the flesh-pots, and had a capital notion of doing things properly, and two bulky hampers in charge of his butler and footman had accompanied them from town. Maurice, in particular, was in high feather; he had put a hundred on the winner and was consequently more enamoured of his theory than ever. They were very merry over the lunch, and, when

they trooped back to the box to once more enjoy the sport, Miss Molecombe vowed that racing was the most exciting amusement in which she had ever embarked, and that a proprietress of race-horses like Mrs. Enderby was a woman wondrously favoured of fortune.

"You will have to lay out some of your winnings," exclaimed Edith, "in purchasing two or three more racers. It must be so nice to have a few of one's own."

"No, no, Mrs. Enderby," laughed Grafton, "we must make a great deal more money than we've done so far before we start our stud. You are to appoint me your master of the horse, remember, and I can't authorise our beginning as yet."

It would be tedious to follow our friends through all the vicissitudes of fortune. Interesting as the fierce battle between backer and bookmaker is to those engaged, it is somewhat wearisome to read about. Suf-

fice it to say, that wagering under the sage advice of Bob Grafton, when after the last race but one they made their way back to the train, they were all winners with one exception. Flushed with success, Maurice had trusted to his own judgment instead of relying upon his mentor, and unfortunately had done so for a considerable sum. He alone had lost money on the day; the others, although far from requiring sacks to carry home their winnings, were still victors on the afternoon; and Edith Molecombe, at all events, was convinced that racing was the sport of kings, as, indeed, it may well be termed so far as English monarchs are concerned.

Many a black Ascot has opened as seductively as this one, and looked like a very garden of Bendemeer to the fashionable London throng, who have already found their resources severely taxed to keep pace with

the constantly recurring exigencies of the season. The veterans put but little faith in these gay openings, and the fielders blench not a whit because the first day goes against them. The former have seen the storm-clouds gather heavily round the Royal Hunt Cup—that prettiest of gambling races—and the decision of the Wokinghams cause Ascot to close, metaphorically speaking, in a gloom dark as Erebus. It had been settled that the ladies were not to go down on the off-day, but the men all met again at Waterloo, Maurice keener than ever for the fray, and with a firm conviction, shared indeed by the other two, that it was a card easy to pick winners from. But disaster came with the opening race, when the favourite, upon whom two ,and in some instances even three, to one were laid, was most ignominiously beaten. The second race was attended with a similar result, and then came the pause

which usually precedes the Royal Hunt Cup. The competitors were numerous, and the betting remarkably heavy; but the powerful stable that owned Duke Humphrey were apparently not to be stayed by any efforts of the bookmakers, and continued to back their horse. Two of the patricians connected with that stable were as shrewd judges and as bold speculators as any men on the turf, and sheer weight of metal kept their horse at the head of the poll, although many of the others were also backed heavily. Acting under the advice of Grafton, Maurice had thrown in his lot with Duke Humphrey.

He was standing against the rails of the lawn, scanning the competitors as they cantered past, when a voice he thought he knew struck upon his ear.

"Do as you like," said the speaker, "but I tell you it is so. I know all that; I've heard it all before. Lord Lynton and Sir

Ralph don't throw their money away, I grant you. They make mistakes at times, and they're making one here. There's a tout I employ on those Downs, and he's about the best of his calling in England. They've tried Duke Humphrey all right enough, but their training-ground is not the new mile at Ascot, and they have not yet quite opened their eyes to the fact that their horse is a rogue."

Maurice had recognised the speaker by this, and looked round to make sure that he was right in his conjecture. Richard Madingley was turned slightly away from him, but the satchel hung from his shoulder left no doubt about the part he played on the racecourse.

"And you think, then," said Dick's companion, a somewhat over-dressed young man, "that Jerry can beat the Duke?"

"No, not if the Duke would try; but he

won't like the hill, and he won't like the struggle; and so I recommend you, if you want to get out of your scrape, to back Jerry this time. You can get a good price, at least you could just now. I've made my book for him, and backed him besides."

Maurice wondered if there could be anything in what Madingley said; he had looked with rather contempt upon that gentleman's judgment at Tunnleton, and considered that he himself was a far better judge, which, had he analysed it, was simply based upon the fact that he happened to know more about the "Wandering Nun" than Madingley. No, he decided if he was to let his own opinion be swayed by every idle rumour he heard, he might back half the horses in the race. "Jerry," he muttered, contemptuously, and here he turned round and asked one of the outside book-makers what that horse's price was.

"I've done on the race, sir," replied the man civilly, "but I laid one hundred to six about that one."

Maurice walked quietly back to his box to see the race, where he found his two friends duly installed, and with their glasses in their hands. There was the usual slight delay at the post, and then the bell announced that the field for the Hunt Cup was away.

"We can't see 'em till they top the hill," cried Grafton. "Keep your glasses on its crest, Maurice. All right so far," he exclaimed, as the charging squadron, glittering like a tulip bed in the summer sun flashed in sight, "Duke Humphrey is lying fourth."

And now the squandering began. A little more and there were only six in it, opposite the stand there were but three. Duke Humphrey was leading, but sticking to his quarters like a bur on the hand were a pair of antagonists who promised to give trouble.

Another stride or two and the one on the near side has shot his bolt, and gives way beaten, but the one on the off closes with him inch by inch, and no sooner does the Duke find this doughty opponent at his girths than he lays back his ears, and swerving across the course enables Jerry to win by a good half-length. From the box they cannot be sure of the result, but when the numbers go up Maurice sees that Dick Madingley has been at all events right this time. The ill-luck of the backers continues through the afternoon, favourite after favourite goes down, and on the homeward journey Maurice feels a little serious when he reflects upon his losses.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ST. JAMES' PALACE STAKES.

Maurice had begun the week with a very handsome balance at his banker's, derived entirely from the victories of Uncle John's flying filly, but he might well look serious when he thought of the inroads he had made upon that balance during the last two days. The latent demon of gambling had been aroused in him, and he had already discovered that it requires a man of iron will to follow a system on the turf, and a little more

knowledge of that amusement will show him that a system is fallible on a racecourse as it is at the gaming-table. It is certainly harder to carry out, for in the latter case you will be allowed to pursue your theory untroubled by advice, whilst in the former you are generally advised of nearly as many winners as there are runners in the stake about to be contended for. Neither his wife nor Grafton had the slighest idea of the magnitude of his speculations.

Mr. Hampton the bookmaker was a prominent member of Tattersall's, and at Ascot had a particular coign of vantage, which custom seemed to have made his own. At the corner of the inner ring, adjacent to the Grand Stand, and just beneath the lower gallery of the Iron stand, was a square pillar about five feet high; from the top of this Mr. Hampton was wont to offer to give or take the odds to all comers. It was an

excellent position for his purpose; everybody could find him, and he was both within reach of those in Tattersall's enclosure and also of those without the pale. His secretary stood, book in hand, at the foot of the pillar, taking note of his transactions as quickly as they were made, and such was the swarm of customers at the foot of the pillar, that it was all the secretary could do to write down his employer's wagers.

Long habit had made the pair thoroughly expert at their business, and it was rarely that Hampton's memory faltered as to what sum he had laid against any particular horse. It was with this man that Maurice had carried on his speculations. He could not go into the inner ring, and in the outer lawn had not the knowledge which would enable him to distinguish good men and true from the pirates who mingled with them.

Hampton knew Mr. Enderby to be a friend of Grafton, and that had been introduction enough for him; besides, he had given the bookmaker a hundred-pound note through the medium of Grafton, when the "Wandering Nun" was beaten for the Oaks, and therefore Hampton had been only too glad to welcome him as a new client.

There had never been such a glorious Ascot week known, said the pleasure-loving dames and demoiselles who, robed in their freshest and prettiest, thronged the Waterloo platform on the day of the Gold Cup.

"There had never been such a deuce of a time seen," said their male belongings, who had passed the last eight-and-forty hours in weary battle with the bookmakers. Men studied the card gravely, and pronounced it promising.

"A winning card, Mrs. Enderby," said

Grafton gaily, "better than the first day's even, and we did pretty well then."

"And it need to be," replied old Millison, "for if they don't have a change for the better the gentlemen will be all clean broke."

"We are going to see your colours out to-day, Mrs. Enderby, and I think we must all have a plunge on the 'Wandering Nun.' She ought to win the St. James's Palace Stakes, if well, and they would hardly have sent her to Ascot unless she was supposed to have a race in her."

"Yes, Mrs. Enderby," exclaimed Edith, "when we see your pretty blue and white sleeves go by victorious our throats must make the welkin ring. Isn't that the proper way to put it, Mr. Grafton?—and oh! by the way, what *is* the welkin?"

"That's known only to the poets," replied

Grafton, "and the craft keep that mystery safely to themselves."

They arrived at Ascot in time to see the royal *cortége* sweep up the course in state; the Master of the Buckhounds, attended by his huntsman and whips, riding at the head of the procession. There was much cheering from all parts of the course, and much waving of pocket handkerchiefs from the grand stand, as the prince and princess bowed their acknowledgments. Royalty safely disposed of, racing people settled down to the regular business of the day.

It would have been well for Maurice Enderby if he could have overheard a conversation which took place on the corner of the lawn next the racecourse about this very time. Mr. Pick and Richard Madingley had been holding grave conference over the afternoon programme, at the conclusion of which Mr. Pick remarked—

"We had a rare innings yesterday. I tell you what, Dick, the swells looked blue enough over it, but I've a strong idea that indigo will be nothing to 'em by the time the card's finished to-day. This 'Wandering Nun' will be facer the first, there'll be heavy plunging on her, and I've got a hint from a man I can depend on that she is not quite up to concert-pitch."

"There is one thing more; you remember that young parson who spoilt my game at Tunnleton. I always stuck to it he was a betting-man, and he is here, and what is more he is backing 'em and no mistake. I was just putting a young friend of mine on Jerry for the Hunt Cup yesterday, when I twigged him with his ears back listening to all I was saying. Well, after that I stalked my gentleman and found him interviewing Hampton before every race. Now I owe that fellow a pretty heavy score, and I should

like to settle a bit of it at this meeting. If you give me a lift I think we can induce him to back a loser or two pretty heavily."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Pick, "from all you've told me I shouldn't think you would be the man to whom he would come for advice, but if you can speak to him put him on the 'Wandering Nun' to begin with."

"I can't speak to him for one thing," rejoined the other, "and he'll back that one safe enough without ever a hint from me; he's always been mad about her; no, from my being right about Jerry he's pretty sure to pay attention to what I say; I want him to overhear a little talk between you and me before the Gold Cup; you understand?"

Mr. Pick grinned in reply.

"Yes," he said, "that also promises to be a queer race, but we'll put the parson on the winner, no fear—rather!" and, with an

ominous wink Mr. Pick disappeared through the wicket of the inner ring.

One or two minor races were disposed of to start with, resulting in no material difference between backers and fielders, and then the numbers were hoisted for the St. James's Palace Stakes. The "Wandering Nun" was the cynosure of all eyes in the pack; she was pronounced a grand mare, and many of her admirers marvelled not a little how she had lost the Oaks; her coat shone like satin, and the crowd generally announced her in splendid condition. One or two old hands, and more especially those who knew the mare best, shook their heads and muttered "She would be the better for another gallop or two," but these cavillers were deemed hypercritical, and the crowd, full of enthusiasm for John Madingley's filly, rushed back to the ring prepared to stake their money freely on what many of

them declared was the "best thing of the meeting." The fielders were apparently of the same way of thinking, and declined, in the first instance, to do business under three to one "on," and some of the irrepressible, who are always anxious to be early in the market, laid those odds on the "Wandering Nun." The bookmakers took a point shorter later on, but excitable Maurice, one can easily imagine, had not waited for that but promptly laid Hampton six hundred pounds to two hundred on the mare as soon as the betting opened.

That there was great excitement in Mrs. Enderby's box it is needless to say. The ladies had not only invested one of those subscribed fivers but all such winnings as still remained to them from the Tuesday, and their glasses were riveted on the "Wandering Nun" the minute she made her appearance. A slashing, dark chestnut

mare, with not a speck of white about her save the blaze on her face, and looking really fit to run for her life, except to a thoroughly trained eye, owned by a man also well acquainted with the mare. The ladies were enthusiastic, and even Grafton, accustomed as he was to the vicissitudes of the race-course and carefully as he had scanned the "Wandering Nun" in the paddock, told Mrs. Enderby that he thought she was sure to see her favourite win to-day.

The race may be told in a few words; the "Wandering Nun" apparently held her opponents safe until she reached the distance, then it was seen that she was palpably in difficulties, and, though she struggled gamely till her jockey ceased riding, she only finished a bad third to two animals of infinitely inferior class to herself. The want of condition up the punishing Ascot mile had beaten her.

A fierce shout of exultation with which the ring welcomed the downfall of the favourite was succeeded by an ominous silence. Everybody connected with racing knew that one of the heaviest betting meetings seen of late was going all one way, and that the week was likely to end in wide-spread disaster and leave many a gap in the fashionable world; even the ring looked somewhat askance at its good fortune, and a hard-headed northern member of the fraternity was heard to say to one of his exultant brethren,

"Noa, noa, laad, it's too good; if the swells don't have a turn or two before we finish there will be no saatling worth speaking of."

In Mrs. Enderby's box there was much lamentation; not only had they lost their money, and women never like that, but they were all much mortified at seeing the

famous mare, with which they had proudly identified themselves, beaten, and it was with a sense of relief that Bessie and Edith Molecombe welcomed Grafton's proposal that they should take a turn on the lawn and then walk up the course, have a look into the royal inclosure, and see the horses parade for the Gold Cup. Maurice had disappeared the moment the race was decided, and Mrs. Millison, a portly lady not much given to exertion, declined to leave her chair even to feast her eyes on the millinery triumphs displayed in front of the Royal Stand; however she made no objection to being left alone, and so, under the charge of Mr. Millison and Grafton, the others sallied forth.

Like many another plunger of that memorable Ascot, Maurice glanced moodily at his betting-book and wondered whether he could afford to go on; he knew very

well that he had no more right to continue than he ever had to have begun, but still, thanks to the thousand guineas, he had not yet got to the end of his balance at his banker's. It was impossible that things could go on like this; it would never do to give up now, luck must turn He sauntered idly towards the entrance of the inner ring.

The next race, which was a small one, had virtually resolved itself into a match; it looked pretty well a certainty for one, and, flushed with success, the ring were liberal enough to take short odds about the result. Once more did Maurice boldly reply to Hampton's challenge, and this time his venture was crowned with success. He had the satisfaction of feeling that he had reduced his losses to some small extent. He had not been up to the box to see this race but had viewed it from the rails, and, as

he turned away, he found himself face to face with Dick Madingley.

"How do you do, Mr. Enderby?" said Dick; "you were pretty severe upon me because the people at Tunnleton took an idea into their heads and declared that I was a liar and impostor; do you think there is much to choose between us now?"

"You'll be good enough not to address yourself to me in future," rejoined Maurice haughtily.

"Now don't go on in that way, Mr. Enderby. I'll own I couldn't stand you at Tunnleton because I looked upon you as an arrant hypocrite; you declared you never bet on races."

"Nor did I," rejoined Maurice quickly.

"No matter; I suppose you'll hardly pretend you don't now, and I like you all the better for it. I'd do you a good turn if you would let me."

"I want neither your advice nor your conversation," replied Maurice coldly.

"Go your own way then," replied Dick; "you must have had a pretty bad time, like the rest of them, and the upset of the 'Wandering Nun' would not improve things for you; she was a favourite of yours from the first. Oh, you needn't be afraid," continued Dick, as Maurice made a gesture of impatience, "after the Gold Cup is over perhaps you'll wish you had listened to what I had got to say," and, turning sharply on his heel, Madingley disappeared amongst the throng.

Maurice could hardly suppose that Dick would do him a good turn. He must have been singularly blind if he had failed to see the rage and malice concentrated in Madingley's face at their last interview. He had not been the cause of his exposure in Tunnleton, but it was he who had baffled his

projects by threatening to divulge the further information he had acquired concerning him. No living thing likes being hunted except perhaps foxes, and man is wont to treasure up fierce resentment against his social pursuer. No, whatever his motive might be, it would be absurd to suppose that he could feel any desire to be of use to him, Maurice Enderby. And yet Maurice could not divest himself of the idea that Dick was really in possession of mysterious information about the big race now so soon to be run.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOLD CUP.

Mrs. Enderby and Edith most thoroughly enjoyed their stroll through the lawn. Under Grafton's guidance they passed through the wicket, and proceeded up the course till they were opposite the Royal Inclosure, where they feasted their eyes on the very last efforts of the crack London modistes. It is a wondrous show, that lawn on a fine Cup day, when fashion's fairest daughters ruffle it in all their bravery. It was their first experience of Ascot, remem-

ber. The two country girls were delighted with everything they saw. Grafton, it need scarcely be said, knew by sight everyone who was anyone in the London world, and pointed out many celebrities to his charges. "And now," he said, as the roar of the betting-ring broke once more upon the ear, "it is getting time we went back. The numbers are up, and we shall have the horses out directly."

As they reentered the wicket, Grafton and his companion had fallen a little behind Bessie and Mr. Millison. Suddenly Bob felt a strange flutter on the little hand within his arm. He turned quickly to see what was the matter. Miss Molecombe's face was very pale, and her eyes were looking into infinite space with that far-away look which we all assume when determined not to see anyone.

Just in front of them stood Mr. Richard Madingley, busily vociferating,

"The Gold Cup I'll take odds upon."

He was well dressed enough, but there could be no mistaking what his vocation was even by one so little versed in race-courses as Edith Molecombe. He was busy taking money, and giving in exchange tickets which he took from the bag slung across his shoulder. Grafton would have led his charge away, but ere he could do so Madingley had caught sight of them, and, though Edith was most certainly not looking at him, the unabashed scamp, with a smile, deliberately raised his hat to her. As Grafton told Maurice afterwards, he never felt more inclined to try his hand at physical force; but, although aware that this man's salutation was a positive insult to Miss Molecombe, there was of course nothing to be done; to have resented it would have only made a scandal, in which Edith's name would have been bandied about.

Grafton, having seen Miss Molecombe safe to the box, at once disappeared to see what was doing in the betting-ring. On his way thither he ran across Maurice, who eagerly asked him what he thought of the Cup.

"Well, I don't know much what to think of it. How are they betting?"

"There are only two backed in earnest. They take even money about the Viking, and there's a large party who are backing old Bellona."

"Ah! I can quite understand that," observed Grafton. "They know the old mare can go the course, and it's yet to be seen whether the young one can stay." And with that Grafton disappeared into the inner inclosure. Almost immediately afterwards Maurice's attention was arrested by the voice of Dick Madingley. He was talking to one or two of his brethren, and apparently

perfectly unaware that Maurice was in his vicinity.

"No, don't tell me," he was exclaiming in much the same arrogant way he had been wont to assert his opinion at the Tunnleton Club, "this Viking won't win. Old Bellona will gallop him to a standstill. The swells will get another spill, you see if they don't. I have it pretty straight from the stable. They very much doubt whether their horse can stay, but they hope it will be a slow run race, and then they know that they can cut the old mare down for speed. But the Bellona people are quite as wideawake as their neighbours, and they mean the race to be run right through."

The little group seemed much impressed with Mr. Madingley's views, and they all agreed that to take three to one about Bellona under the circumstances on this information was about as good a chance of

making money as often fell to men, and then apparently separated to take advantage of it.

Maurice was strangely impressed with this conversation. It coincided in some measure with Grafton's idea of the race, and moreover it offered the great chance to recoup himself, for which he so anxiously looked. His mind was made up quickly; he would wait no longer, but take Hampton's fifteen hundred to five hundred if he could get it.

Verily, General Shrewster was right. The gambler's instinct was strong within Maurice.

Hampton hesitated for a moment, and then replied, "All right, Mr. Enderby, three monkeys to one Bellona;" and, that little bit of business satisfactorily concluded, Maurice thought he would go back to the box and see the race. There he was not

a little surprised to find that Grafton had changed his opinion and backed the favourite, both for himself and his fair clients.

"You told me you fancied the mare for the race," said Maurice.

"So I did," replied Grafton; "but when I got inside there I found all the best judges were going for the Viking, and they assured me there wasn't the slightest doubt about his staying."

Well, these are the sort of rumours that backers of horses are usually destined to hear till the race is run. Up to the very last moment there is always somebody to presage disaster to the steed that carries your investment. Some *gobe-mouche* invariably encounters you with tales detrimental to that luckless horse's welfare. He may be right, he may be wrong, but his actual knowledge is certainly no more than that of the policeman who keeps the wicket;

and I once saw that official gravely consulted on the subject of the Gold Cup by an unmistakeable West-end cockney.

There was no delay at the starting-post on this occasion. The half-dozen runners were dispatched almost immediately, and the race itself was as tame a struggle for the Cup as ever was seen, and may be told in two lines. Bellona made running till they were in the Swinley Bottom, when Viking took up the running and galloped home an easy winner by twenty lengths, to the great delight of Mrs. Enderby and Edith. The irony of fate is common enough on our leading race-courses. Wives and daughters rejoice over the gloves and bon-bons they have won, knowing little what the triumph has cost their husbands and brothers. The fickle goddess is capricious, and is wont to deal better with our feminine belongings than she does with ourselves

Maurice laughed gaily as he congratulated his wife and the rest on their success, and in answer to Grafton's inquiries as to what he had won himself, replied, "I was not so lucky as you all seem to have been; my investment, sad to say, was on Bellona," and then Maurice abruptly left the box.

This last defeat was a crushing blow. He knew now that he was getting near the end of his resources, and felt that he had hardly capital enough remaining with which to take advantage of a turn in the tide, even if it should come. It had not occurred to him that the conversation he had overheard had been got up expressly for his benefit; and, only that Madingley, afraid of risking this chance of wreaking his vengeance, sternly discountenanced it, one of his companions upon that occasion would have endeavoured to lay Maurice the odds against Bellona, which mare the confederates be-

lieved really to have no sort of chance with the favourite.

But Dick Madingley's malice would have hardly been gratified without his making Maurice aware that he had been the victim of a little conspiracy. One of his associates had dogged Enderby until he had heard him make that big bet with Hampton in accordance with the false information he had been allowed to overhear. The confederate quickly reported the fact to his principal, and it was with much chuckling Madingley and his companions saw the race terminate just as they had anticipated.

"Come along," said Dick in such jubilant tones as a man may use who has won his money and worsted his enemy; for although Dick had fielded in the first instance he had turned round and backed the favourite to finish with. "Come along," he said, "I want to give the parson another chance; he

benefitted so much by listening to gentlemen's private conversation last time that he is safe to be keen to be in our little secrets again," and Mr. Madingley favoured his friends with a wink and grimace.

"Yes," rejoined Mr. Pick, "it was a very neat little plant, but it is a thousand pities we couldn't have collared that five hundred instead of Hampton, it would have been so much more finished like."

The confederates had not to go far before they saw Maurice, smoking a meditative cigar and thinking over what he had best do next. With another wink at his companions Dick took up his position within earshot of, but with his back towards, Maurice. They clustered round him like bonnets round a card-sharper, and then Mr. Madingley commenced his narration.

"I'll just tell you how it was, you never saw such a game. There's a fellow here

whom I've vowed to pay out for an ugly trick he served me in the country not long since. He's as innocent as a baby when he gets on a race-course, and I saw him going about with his ears cocked listening here and listening there, and seeing what he could make of it all. When he had put it all together I knew he looked upon it that I was a tidy judge of racing, and it suddenly occurred to me to put him on a 'wrong 'un' for the Cup. I let him hear a valuable piece of information, and am blessed if the sagacious cuss didn't trot off and back it for a monkey."

An ostentatiously loud guffaw followed the conclusion of Dick's narrative. It was not that his listeners were really amused, it was more like the conspirators' chorus in "Madame Angot," a necessary *fanfaronade* for the proper rendering of the plot. Maurice had heard every word, and knew that

he was intended to hear it, and could have grovelled on the lawn at his own foolishness. Was it likely that any information ostentatiously dropped by such men as Dick Madingley could have any other object than to delude the bystanders? Was it likely that Madingley would drop a hint for his benefit? Of course not; but that he would gladly be the cause of his losing a lot of money was easy of comprehension. He had thirsted himself to strike Dick to the ground at Tunnleton, and was it to be supposed that Dick's feelings towards him had not been of similar nature? He had read of the salting of gold and diamond mines, and saw now, idiot that he was, how possible it was to salt gold mines on the turf. If there was one man at Ascot whose ill-will he had good cause to dread it was Richard Madingley, and he had been insane enough to follow his advice on a big race.

"Fool! fool! thrice sodden fool!" he muttered. "The veriest child would have mistrusted one who had always been his avowed enemy, and I must actually put faith in him. I start on a system and neglect to follow it. I put my own judgment of racing against Grafton's, who has been following it the last ten years. No wonder I have come to grief. To finish with," he continued grimly, "I happen to have thrown in for the worst meeting backers have had this year. Well, I've gone too far to give in now. It may as well be a little worse as left where it is. Luck must change, one cannot always go on backing losers."

It is to be hoped not, still the sad fact remains that one may do so for a very considerable time. There is nothing in this life in which luck does not form an ingredient.

Bob Grafton, lounging through the lawn where he smoked his after-luncheon cigar, sud-

denly ran across Mr. Hampton. "Well, we got the best of you that last time, but you and your brethren are having a rare meeting."

"Well, yes, Mr. Grafton, we are, as poor Ned Caley used to say, I am almost tired of winning money. I beg pardon, Mr. Grafton, there's a gentleman you introduced me to, who I think you should give a hint to. Mr. Enderby is having an awful time."

"But he's not betting high, surely?" exclaimed Grafton.

"Well, sir," replied Hampton, "of course I don't know anything about his income or resources, nor do I know what other bets he may be making, but he must be getting on towards a couple of thousand to the bad in my ledger."

"I had no idea he was betting like that," replied Grafton quietly. "He don't usually speculate so heavily, but he's good enough, if that's what you mean."

"No, Mr. Grafton, I didn't quite mean that. I only mean that he's backing his bad luck right out. I've seen a meeting or two like this before, and I can only say if I was a backer I should turn it up and go back to London."

As Grafton walked away he reflected rather seriously over what the bookmaker had told him; he had no doubt that Hampton's story was correct, and that Maurice, carried away by the excitement of what might be called his first race-meeting, had staked heavy sums again and again. He knew perfectly well what this was to the Enderbys. It meant sweeping away all these winnings of the "Wandering Nun," even if they sufficed to pay Maurice's liabilities. He thought rather ruefully that it was he who had been at the bottom of this Ascot excursion. However, there was no more to be said, but it made Grafton some-

what grave for the remainder of the afternoon.

They were a somewhat sombre carriage-full on their way back to town. First and foremost they were all tired, and in the crowd of the Cup day had a considerable difficulty in getting away from Ascot station. Two trains leaving before they succeeded in obtaining the accommodation they required; and those who have experienced that wait at the station after a fatiguing and unsuccessful day will quite understand that there was not much life or conversation in the party on the way home—in short, most of them, I think, slept more or less, and if Maurice did not he was at all events chewing the bitter cud of his own thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEWS OF ISANDHLWANA.

Ascot is over: there is nothing left but to pay the bill, and Maurice sits gloomily this Saturday morning, pondering over the pages of his betting-book. It is no use hoping for a mistake in the figures, he has gone over it at least a dozen times, trying to cheat himself with the idea that he has added it up wrongly; but no, the figures are inexorable, his losses are larger than he had fancied them. Even if he drains his

banking account to the last shilling it will not suffice to discharge his Ascot liabilities. He does not quite know what to do; he must go and consult Grafton about it; indeed, he would have to do that in any case, as it was through him that he usually settled with Hampton. He did not quite relish the confession he had got to make to his friend. It is difficult to mask ill-tidings from those who love us and are accustomed to note every change of our face—and, to add to his perplexities, Bessie saw something had gone wrong with him, and, though she was very far from guessing the whole truth, it did not require much penetration on her part to suspect that he had lost more money during the week than was justifiable.

However, having calmed her apprehensions as well as he could, he started forth for Grafton's chambers in Half Moon Street,

and found that gentleman at breakfast, although it was past noon.

"Come in," he said, "and sit down; I always take it out after a hard week's racing, especially when it has been such a week of disaster as this has. I've a philosopher amongst my acquaintance who always takes to his bed when he is hard hit; as he says, it is the most economical thing you can do. You don't spend money, and are hedging any amount of sleep for livelier times."

All the time Bob rattled on he was watching his companion's face keenly—as he rightly guessed, he was about to listen to a discussion of ways and means. He had listened to so many from all sorts of people that he was quick at reading the signs of the storm-beaten. Indeed, he enjoyed quite a reputation in this way. Clear-headed and fertile in resource, it was quite a common saying amongst his own set,

"Go to Bob Grafton, he'll pull you through if anybody can."

"I want to consult you, Bob," said Maurice, as he took a chair.

"I know," interrupted Grafton; "you got hit deuced hard at Ascot. I'd no idea you were betting heavily, or else I should have told you not to be such a fool as to do it. However, it's no use talking about that now; the question is, what does the scrape come to?"

"Twenty-four eighty," replied Maurice, as he handed his memorandum book to his host.

"Well, you've joined the plunging school with a vengeance," rejoined Grafton. "I heard something of this accidentally at Ascot. The names of the heavy losers generally ooze out in the ring, and I suppose you attracted attention as a new hand. But I'd no idea that it was so bad as this.

Well, it's no use going over it all, you've no doubt totted it up correctly. *How* it was lost is of no consequence—that it has got to be paid at once—is. What are the assets ?"

"About five hundred short of that amount if I draw out my last shilling."

"Well, you can't quite do that, you must have some ready money to carry on with. Hampton, I see, is your main creditor. You must let me have as much as you can spare on Monday morning. I'll pay off the few minor creditors, I will give Hampton all there is left on account, and ask him to give you time for the remainder."

"Yes," said Maurice, gloomily, "I know all that can be done, but the worst of it is, I don't see what time is to do for me."

"I do," rejoined Grafton; "and, if you'll promise me solemnly not to go plunging any more, I can give you a gleam of com-

fort in that direction. Remember, the 'Wandering Nun' was all amiss at Epsom, and she hadn't got over it at Ascot, but I can tell you what I saw there, some of the cleverest men on turf were backing her quite quietly for the Leger. Now, you stand to win quite enough upon her without backing her. Half the Leger Stakes will satisfy Hampton and put your banking account in a very satisfactory position—should it happen to come off."

"Let me only get out of the trouble that way, and I will give my word never to go racing again. I can't trust myself, Bob; it's intoxication, infatuation, what you will; but I couldn't look on at it without betting."

"No, I understand you now," replied Grafton, "and deeply regret I ever persuaded you to accompany me to a race-course. I've met your sort before, nothing

but total abstinence is of any use to you; and I tell you what, old man, the sooner you get something to do—to work your superfluous steam off at, the better. You're certain to come to grief if you stop idling about town."

Talk about marking out our own career, how very little we often have to say to it. Men who have started for the bar have become eminent dramatists; men who have started for the navy have become famous judges; while warriors like Cromwell and Clive were not bred to arms. Had it not been for Uncle John's wedding present, Maurice Enderby might have blossomed into a respectable clergyman; as it is, wherever his future may lie, he will never attain celebrity in this wise. Yet Maurice's pen was getting recognised amongst the guild of literature as that of a bright, lively writer with considerable power of satire, one

who handled the topics of the day in light, masterly, and, above all, readable fashion. It might not be very lucrative employment as yet, but he had at all events established a market for his wares.

Now another person whose character had been somewhat altered by Ascot was Miss Molecombe. She had been, previously to her affair with Dick Madingley, a quiet conventional young lady; but these latter events had imparted a certain amount of dash and possession to her manner which it had not possessed before. She had been pretty well cured of her passion for Dick Madingley before going to stay with the Millisons. No girl who had dared so much for a lover could have stood the cool, premeditated neglect that followed the *fiasco* of her attempted elopement. She had stood up for him for some time, but her womanly pride had been cut to the quick, and it must have been indeed a very clear explanation

which would restore him to her good graces. At Ascot she saw him in his true colours, and the very salt was sown over her dead love with a vengeance; but strange to say she returned to Tunnleton with a great admiration for Maurice Enderby. He had been so loyal and true to her, and above all the very iniquities now charged against him rather glorified him in her eyes. That Mr. Enderby had withdrawn from the Church, and had lost a very large sum of money at Ascot, was no secret whatever in Tunnleton. The latter Dick Madingley had taken care should reach that town, where he hoped it might do Maurice considerable harm. He was not aware that Enderby had severed all connection with it, but the blackening of Maurice's character was a thing to which he was ready to devote himself ungrudgingly. But Miss Molecombe looked back upon Maurice's misdeeds, when they came to her knowledge, with a species of reverence.

We all understand it. The petty sinners regard the great ones with a quiet awe. And the mild gamblers of the race-course revere the magnates of the turf, whose chief claim to celebrity lies in the fact that they bet in thousands, instead of wagering the more modest stakes of their fellows. Even mere boys who have lost some thousands in anticipation of their patrimony are looked at with morbid interest, and yet if there is one thing within every one's accomplishment it is the losing of money.

When General Shrewster heard the Ascot story he wrote a few sensible lines to Maurice, in which, while regretting that his warning had been so quickly found too prophetic, he repeated Bob Grafton's advice of "total abstinence," and further added, "There is trouble arising in South Africa, and you should hold yourself in readiness to take advantage of the earliest opportunity

of volunteering that may arise. Count upon me to back you in this. Now, to help yourself. I have heard that you wield a smartish pen of your own. Can't you get an appointment from one of the daily papers should these rumours turn out true? It would be no detriment to you as an extra aid, remember, to be in possession of the ear of a prominent daily. Take my advice, and look after the second string at once, and, if you can't speak whatever the lingo of those parts may be, well, pretend you can."

Maurice was thunderstruck as he finished this letter. Mr. Greville, in his memoirs, recalls how Epsom and Newmarket utterly absorb a man, and Maurice had forgotten for some days to take note of anything in the papers that did not bear upon the pursuit uppermost in his thoughts, but though he heeded them not, and the Government also troubled their heads but little about it, there

were signs of stormy times on the Cape frontier. We were acting with our usual contempt for our neighbours, arrogantly sending a corporal's guard to put down a simmering insurrection which required a division to intimidate it.

It is our way, I suppose. We are so impressed with the manner in which a handful of policemen cow a London mob, that we believe a like handful of soldiers will suffice to strike terror into the hearts of our savage neighbours. We are astonished to find that, much as well-trained soldiers can effect by science and superior weapons, yet, when the foe, exulting in his numbers, has, reckless of loss, fought his way in to a hand to hand struggle, the barbarian's sinews are tougher than those of our own men. Overweening confidence and insufficient numbers have been the cause of more than one disaster to our arms, and first successes give courage to the enemy.

Here and there an old military man, who knew the country, shook his head, and prophesied that if Government did not stamp this little agitation out promptly they would find themselves involved in an awkward war before many weeks were over.

The croakers were right—these prophets of ill omen are at times—and, when the cable flashed the news that a British regiment had been annihilated, the nation was one in demanding that the Zulu king should be at once brought to his knees. A mere question of time and troops, no doubt, but meanwhile those with a stomach for fighting were like to get their fill of it.

The story of the all but annihilation of the twenty-fourth, and heroic defence of Rorke's Drift, had not yet reached England, when General Shrewster wrote, but it followed pretty quickly on the heels of his letter, and Maurice saw now that the chance

had come to him. As General Shrewster had foreseen, brigadiers, staff-officers, and newspaper correspondents, were all on the wing, and tumbling over each other in their anxiety to procure employment of some sort beyond the Tugela.

NOTE.—There is some little discrepancy in the time of the disaster of Isandhlwana, and history has had to bend here to the exigencies of fiction. I can only

"Fairly acknowledge I
At school or college I
Never was very precise in chronology."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEAGUER.

If England had been startled and Europe amazed at the terrible intelligence that the cable had flashed from South Africa, it was nothing to the dismay that spread through the country itself. In Natal the news of the disaster produced a positive panic. It was rumoured that the Zulu army, flushed with victory, had crossed the Tugela and were in a fair way to overrun the province. Paris and Berlin, as well as London, were aghast

at the catastrophe. Even in civilised warfare it is rare to hear of the annihilation of a regiment, and, singular to relate, it was the same regiment that some thirty odd years before had died grimly fighting almost to a man, in India, on the fatal field of Chillianwallah. That the scare should be pretty general through the provinces bordering on Zululand was excusable, considering that even the military leaders took a most gloomy view of the situation, and at once abandoned the initiative for the defensive.

Had the Zulus of that time been led by one of those wild military enthusiasts who seem born to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm, they would have swept like a torrent across the Tugela, annihilating convoy after convoy in their triumphant march, but, according to the manner of barbarians, their first impulse, after striking a great blow, was to return home in triumph with

their plunder. Our own Highlanders in the last century had a good deal of this feeling, and, though easy to gather for one supreme effort, were difficult to hold together for a continuous campaign.

Colonel Pearson, advancing into Zululand at the head of a long straggling convoy, had arrived as far as Etshowe, when he received news of the catastrophe of Isandhlwana, with orders to entrench himself where he was, and to be prepared to bear the attack of the whole Zulu army. This the column did without loss of time, and for about a month was known to the outer world no more.

The first streaks of dawn were just visible in the heavens; the advanced sentries drop slowly in and report that all is quiet as far as they can ascertain, but every one knows that Etshowe is surrounded by a numerous and subtle foe; they have had

too many proofs of late both of the numbers and cunning of their enemies not to be strictly on the alert; creeping up noiselessly through the night again and again, the Zulus had become only visible at the last moment, when, with a savage yell, they made a determined attempt to rush the entrenchments, but so far they had been invariably repulsed with heavy loss. As the sun tops the horizon and lights up the big rolling prairie, clothed for the most part in long grass, dotted here and there with mealie fields, one recognises how easy it is for the savage foe to conceal his numbers, and, in the hours of darkness, steal up to the attack; but there are keen eyes and stout hearts behind those breastworks, and, as long as the cartridges and food hold out, there is little fear of the Zulus ever getting inside.

A tall, bearded man, clad in semi-military costume, stands resting his elbows on the

parapet and eagerly scans the country through a field-glass, but apparently without discovering anything worthy of his attention. As he puts down his glass a quiet voice by his side observes,

"Another night of tranquillity, Mr. Enderby?"

"Yes, sir," replies Maurice, as he turned and touched his cap to the veteran chief who stood beside him; "you don't suppose they will raise the siege, do you?"

"Not a bit of it," replied the colonel; "I've had much experience on the frontiers, and the Zulus, like all barbarians, are full of tricks and stratagems. They are only trying to lull us into fancied security. I wish we could hear something from the outside; we know less of what is going on than they do in London."

"And know, I should think, sir," replied

Maurice, laughing, "more about the Zulu army than most people."

"Ah," replied the chief, "we can't tell how much of that army we have got around us; except in small bodies we never catch much sight of them by day, and in the night attacks it is difficult to judge of their numbers. By the way, Shrewster, in his letter to me, told me your object in volunteering, and I've seen quite enough of you here to know that you have the makings of a good soldier. Now I can't say for certain, but the probability is in two or three days I shall want a volunteer on a very delicate mission; I don't disguise from you it's a risky one, but if you pull through all right it will count as a special bit of service, and strengthen your claim considerably for a commission."

"It's only too kind of you to give me the chance," replied Maurice; "I can only

promise when the time comes to do my level best."

"That'll do," said the chief; "only don't forget a cool head is the first essential in difficulties," and, with a slight nod, he walked away into the interior of the fort, leaving Maurice to wonder what his special mission might prove.

It was rather a grim consultation at which the chief had next to preside. He had to point out to his second and third in command that their stock of provisions was getting low, and that, though he had no doubt they could hold Etshowe for months had they food, yet their ability to do so was now simply dependent on that fact.

"I don't like to do it, but I am afraid I shall be compelled to put the force upon half-rations. It is a sad necessity, for the men are hard-worked; you can't expect to

get that out of either man or horse unless they are well fed."

"No," replied one of the other officers, "moreover there is a good deal of sickness amongst both officers and men. They don't give in, but stick to their work pluckily enough, still they are not likely to improve upon half rations"

"No," rejoined the Chief, "but there is no sign of any relief for us as yet, and we do know that four weeks at the present issue of food will bring us about to the end of our stock."

"That's true," replied the other, "and, even when we get an intimation that succour is on its way to us, it may be still some time before it arrives."

"Quite so," said the chief, "and as it is clearly our business to hold out till the last I shall put the garrison on half-rations from to-morrow. It looks as if the massacre of

Isandhlwana had been by no means the measure of our disasters. The commander-in-chief would have surely contrived to communicate with us before this if there had not been further trouble."

Maurice's first experience of active service. had been by no means cheering The march up to Etshowe had been all very well; riding through a strange country in which they might hourly expect to be attacked had a wild excitement about it which sent the blood coursing through the veins and made the pulses tingle, but this being cooped up, like a rat in a corner, the dull and depressing routine of siege life, is about the hardest trial that a soldier has to endure, followed as it usually is by all the privations of insufficient food et cetera. As for fighting, the Zulus, to do them justice, took care they should have plenty of that. Maurice, like all his comrades, knew that they were fighting

for their very lives. Their fierce foes had already shown them how they construed "washing their spears," and every one in Etshowe knew that if the place was taken the Zulus would spare no one within its ramparts. Men die hard when fighting for their lives, and so far the Zulus had found Etshowe a stubborn nut to crack. But they knew as well as its beleagured defenders that there was a limit to their provisions, and waited patiently till the time should come when the garrison would have to choose between surrender or that last expedient of the desperate, an attempt to cut their way through.

About two days after the order for half-rations had been given out some of the soldiers were suddenly struck with some singular flashes that illumined the sky in the direction of the lower Tugela, and no sooner was this fact communicated to their officers

than the entire garrison crowded out to see what could be made of it. The officers welcomed it with a great sense of relief. It was apparent to them that their own people were striving to communicate with them by means of the heliograph. It is true that so far they were unable to interpret the signals, but one thing was clear, assistance was approaching, and that one fact did more to raise the spirits of the gallant little band than even luxury in the shape of rations could have done. There is something terribly depressing in utter isolation to most of us, but nothing perhaps tries the soldier more heavily when besieged than complete ignorance of what his friends on the outside may be doing on his behalf. The leaguered force at once attempted to reply in similiar fashion, but the afternoon wore away without their being able to interpret the signals. This however was clear: that friends

were signalling to them, and evidently recognised their flashes in response. Whether they were understood any better than they understood the heliographs of the relieving column they were of course unable to judge, but that assistance was close at hand was beyond all doubt. The next day was a repetition of the abortive signalling, and still, much to his disgust, the commandant found himself in ignorance of what the advancing column was trying to say to him. As far as they could judge by the flashes, the signallers were stationary, and had not moved since yesterday; they were some twenty miles off, apparently, but that was rather a matter of guesswork. The commandant was much exercised in his mind on this point. Was the relieving force held in check by the Zulus, and were they inviting him to co-operate in a grand attack? Was this the meaning of the quiet of the last two or three

days, had the Zulus withdrawn from around Etshowe with a view to giving battle to the relieving force? If so they were probably lying more or less masked on the road leading to the fort. It was, he thought, imperative that he should communicate with the leader of the advancing column. He must send a messenger—a dangerous errand no doubt, still a resolute, well-mounted man might get through, carrying with him such explanations as would make all signalling easy for the future, and who would also be able to speak as to the exact state of things in Etshowe. He had been prepared to do this before when without the knowledge that assistance was so near at hand, and it seemed to him still more necessary to send that messenger now. His mind was soon made up, and then he sent for Maurice.

Briefly he explained what he wanted.

"It's not a nice ride for you, Enderby,

and you'll want both sabre and revolver ready to your hand, but I think if you keep your head cool you'll pull through. A good deal depends upon your horse, and you've my authority to take your choice of any one in the fort."

"Thank you, sir, but I think my own horse looks as well as any of them; he's got a bit of blood about him that'll serve me well if it comes to a pinch. I had plenty of opportunities of trying him on the way up, and know he'll do his best in case of need."

"Good! you'd better start just before daybreak. I will have the road patrolled so as to ensure you a clear start. My impression is that you will see no Zulus till you get some miles from here."

"You don't think they have withdrawn from around Etshowe?" inquired Maurice.

"In the main yes. They've left part of

their army here to watch us, but the bulk of it is withdrawn to give battle to the force coming up to relieve us, and it is as you near that you will run the greatest danger. You had better spend the afternoon concerting a simple code of flashes with Chamberlain; he seems to understand the heliograph better than any one else, and to thoroughly establish communication is, of course, the chief object."

And with a quiet nod the commandant dismissed Enderby for the present.

As for Maurice, he left the room in search of Chamberlain as gay as a lark. A somewhat hazardous piece of service it might be, but it may be doubted whether there was an officer in the garrison who would not have been delighted to change places with him. In war men are called upon to risk their lives day by day, to die with their face to the foe, with the brief epitaph that they have

done their duty, or if fortunate enough to escape shot and steel to be rewarded with the homely but pithy observation "that it was all in the day's work"; but here was a chance. The man who carried out this mission successfully would be sure of praise, and had a fair promise of being mentioned in the despatches. Maurice knew well that in most callings the man who can carry a still tongue is wont to be most trusted by his superiors. To no one of his comrades did he confide his forth-coming departure save Chamberlain. That officer it was necessary to acquaint with the orders he had received, to explain the urgent need of his being instructed in heliography to the extent that time would allow; and before sundown he had mastered sufficient of the science of flashes to feel certain that to the extent of a simple code communication would be established between Etshowe and the relieving

force, should he only succeed in reaching it. That done, he jealously superintended the doing-up of his horse, and then, having finished his own supper, threw himself on his pallet to snatch a few hours' rest before starting on his perilous ride.

CHAPTER X.

A PERILOUS RIDE.

It wanted considerably over an hour to day-break when Maurice was aroused from his slumbers and told that the chief was awaiting him. A toilet is a brief and hasty ceremony at such times, and a very few minutes elapsed before he followed the orderly across the open space to that wing of the mission-house which served as the commandant's quarters.

"I have nothing much more to say to

you," said the veteran, as he acknowledged Maurice's salute, "than to wish you God speed, and shake hands. You will tell how it is with us here to whoever commands the relieving column. Say we can last on the half-ration for three weeks yet, and that they will never turn us out of the fort except by starvation. Take an old hand's advice—spare your horse on the early part of your road so as to keep all the powder you can in him for the time when you will have to trust to his heels. Let the first flash you can send us announce your own safety. The picket report that they can get no touch of the enemy as far as they have been along the road; and now God bless you and send you safe through; the sooner you are in the saddle the better," and as he concluded the veteran extended his hand and exchanged a hearty hand-grip with Maurice.

Enderby's final preparations were soon

concluded. Some two or three hours would either bring him to his destination or see him in the hands of the Zulus if alive. There was no necessity, therefore, for carrying food with him, and it was best he thought to travel as light as possible. He confided a letter to Chamberlain to be forwarded to his wife in the event of the worst happening to him, and then, having looked carefully to girth and bridle, swung himself into the saddle, and made his way quietly to the gate. A quiet "good luck" from the officer commanding there, and then Maurice found himself without the entrenchments, and fairly started on his errand. He jogged gently along at starting, peering into the darkness on every side, for it was now that blackest hour of the night which heralds the dawn, which from late experience he knew was a favourite time with the Zulus for commencing their attack. He would have been

troubled to have increased his speed much at present, for it was just as much as he could do to make out the track, which even in broad daylight was by no means very well defined. More than once he turned in his saddle and checked his horse, while he looked back to see if there was any stir at Etshowe, but no—all was still. He had been travelling now as far as he could guess for about an hour, and, though the fort was long lost to sight, yet his ear must have caught the sharp rattle of musketry and the fierce yells of the foe had there been any attack upon it.

He hailed the first streaks of dawn with no little satisfaction. If the Zulus were more likely to catch sight of him by daylight, he, on the other hand, was more likely to blunder into their midst in the darkness. Then, again, with light it would be possible to travel considerably faster. As

far as he could guess he was now some four miles from the fort, and he hoped had traversed a fourth or so of his journey. And now the sun peeps above the horizon; the stars have faded away; a few minutes more and another day has begun. Maurice pulls up his horse, and gazing around takes stock of the situation. He can see Etshowe behind him, and in the clear morning air can almost make out the sentries on its ramparts; but with that exception there is not a sign of a human being. He can see the track plainly enough now, and just at present it seems to be pretty fair going. Putting his horse into a hand-canter, he rides gaily forward, and is half inclined to already deem the dangers of his expedition overrated. Still, he had seen too much of the cunning of the Zulus to relax his vigilance, and knows that as yet he has not come to where, in the opinion of his chief, he might expect

to be waylaid by the enemy. He has got over another three miles in easy fashion, and is approaching a place where the road bends considerably to the right. Round that bend he thinks it quite possible he may catch sight of the distant laager of the relieving column. Suddenly he fancies he sees a black head appear for a second above the crop in a mealie field to the right. It disappears almost instantaneously, but another minute convinces him he was not mistaken, as in half a dozen places the dark heads appear for an instant above the crest of the corn, and then as suddenly vanish. Yes, he has come upon the enemy now, and then it flashes across him what is happening. The Zulus have caught sight of him, and are hurrying under cover of the mealies to intercept him just beyond the bend. He knows now that the crisis has arrived, and that

Bay Robin will be called upon to gallop in real earnest.

He shakes up his horse; and, as Bay Robin settles down to his stride, Maurice thanks Heaven that he has a stretch of fair galloping ground in front of him. A yell bursts from the throats of the Zulus as Maurice's quickened pace tells them they are discovered. Throwing off all further attempt at concealment, they come trooping in irregular order through the mealies as fast as they can. But if the corn had afforded them cover in the first instance, and so nearly compassed Maurice's destruction, it stood to him now. It hindered his foes from progressing as fast as they otherwise would; the fleet-footed Zulus could not utilise their speed as they might have done in the open ground, and Maurice saw, with a gleam of exultation, that, with the exception of some half-dozen of the fore-

most, he should easily outstrip the remainder. These were straining every nerve to intercept him just below the bend. Should they fail to arrest him there, Bay Robin would speedily bear him beyond their reach.

"There'll be a tussle for it, my horse," muttered Maurice, as he bent forward in the saddle and patted the animal's neck; "we're tailing them off nicely, but they haven't near so far to go as we have, and those leading fellows will be in time to throw their assegais at us. We must chance it, and take very good care that, if their assegais don't hit us the first time, they have no chance to throw a second."

It turned out even better than Maurice had anticipated. He is round the bend, and then it becomes evident that he will have to deal with no more than three of his enemies. Two of them emerged from the mealie field and gained the edge of the

track just as Enderby comes well round the bend. They are still some hundred and fifty yards from him, while the third man has not as yet emerged from the corn. Drawing his sabre, and setting spurs to his horse, with a wild cheer Maurice dashes straight at them. Breathless with their long run, the two Zulus are not as accurate as usual in their aim. A couple of assegais whizz harmlessly past the horseman. One of the two, a big powerful fellow, makes a desperate snatch at Bay Robin's bridle, only to go down before a swashing sabre-cut that lays his right cheek open in grizzly fashion.

> "But sabres shall swing,
> And head-pieces ring,
> When the gallants of England
> Are up for their King."

muttered Maurice with a grim laugh in all the intoxication of battle, as he and Bay

Robin sped merrily onwards. Forward—away—onward, onward, the best part of a mile is past before Maurice drew bridle, then the broken ground dictated a slackening of speed. Sheathing his sabre he looked back and saw that the Zulus were gathered round the fallen man, still brandishing their spears at him, but they had evidently abandoned all idea of pursuit. Once more he laughed in his beard, but still pricked on as quickly as he could conveniently go over the uneven track. Once more he comes to a stretch of smoother ground, and again presses his horse to a hand-gallop. Bay Robin is barely in his stride when he swerves across the track so suddenly that a less practised horseman than Maurice would very likely have been unseated. It was well the gallant brute had done so, for half-a-dozen assegais whizzed passed his rider that would in all probability have taken effect had it not been for Bay

Robin's being startled by the gleam of the spears in the long grass to his right. As it is, from some cause or other, the horse nearly blunders on his knees, and half-a dozen Zulus rush forward to seize their victim. Quick as thought Maurice draws his revolver from the holster. Crack! crack! and the two nearest bite the dust. Bay Robin recovers himself by a supreme effort, and gallops on with unabated vigour, but it is not for long. Another half-mile and his rider feels the gallant horse faltering in his stride. He turns an anxious glance back, but his foes, singularly enough, have already vanished. He pulls Bay Robin together, but feels that he is dying away under his hand. What has come to him? He lurches in his gallop, and as Maurice pulls him up is beginning to sprawl after the fashion of a drunken man. His rider has barely time to jump from his back ere the honest brute

pitches heavily forward, and then rolls over on his side. It is clear enough now, the cruel assegai is quivering in his flank, and Maurice knows that his charger's last course is run.

He looks round. Small chance of his escape now he thinks. His foes can be but a few hundred yards behind him, and as soon as they see he is dismounted, there is little likelihood but what they will start in hot pursuit; although he can see nothing of them he has small doubt but that they are watching his movements. Singular, he thinks, that a fierce yell of triumph did not burst from their throats as they witnessed the fall of his horse. He drew the revolver from his holster, loosened his sabre in its sheath, and made up his mind to sell his life dearly. That they would be on him before many minutes he looked upon as certain; and then he cast a despairing look

along the track in front of him. Ah! could it be possible? Yes, he felt sure of it—a long way off yet, but there was a laager straight ahead. Could he gain it? and Maurice strode manfully forward.

Every moment he expected to hear the whizz of an assegai; but no; he trudged along a good mile and still his foes made no sign. Again and again he looked back but could see nothing of them, and at last the truth dawned upon him: the Zulus were ambushed with a view to attacking the relieving column as soon as it was once more on its march; they were afraid to follow him further for fear of discovering themselves. Maurice's spirits arose; let him gain the laager and the information he brought with him was of the highest value, not only to those whom he had left but to those he would join.

He had not trudged far before he espied

a small party of horsemen riding leisurely towards him; it was evident, moreover, that they had already caught sight of him; although some distance off he felt pretty sure that these were friends. Another minute and two of them, detaching themselves from the group, came galloping towards him. The foremost was an officer, and, as he reined up his horse close to Maurice, he exclaimed,

"Who are you and where do you come from?"

"I am a messenger from Etshowe," replied Maurice, "and the bearer of important news for your general."

"When did you leave the fort?"

"A little before daybreak."

"They were all right then?" asked the officer eagerly.

"Yes, and quite able to hold out for some time yet."

"Ah, we've been trying to communicate with you for the last two or three days, but our people can't understand your flashes. You haven't come on your feet, surely?"

"No, I left a good horse on the road about three miles back. It was a squeak and I had to ride for it. I pulled through, but they killed my horse, and a right good one he was, too."

"Ah, you came through the Zulus?" said the dragoon; "I suppose they lie pretty thick between us and the fort?"

"Yes," laughed Maurice, as he tramped onwards by the side of his companion's horse; "you will find them thick as thieves some few miles ahead."

"Well," replied the other, "the general will be glad to see you; he is very anxious, I know, to get news from Etshowe. It was a great relief to us all to get those answering flashes on the heliograph; we couldn't

make out what you said but they showed you were all right, and we're within a long day's march of the fort now. We are advancing rather slowly because we expect to come in contact with the enemy every hour. Now if you will follow with my orderly I'll gallop back to camp and report that you are on your way to the general. You've a good three miles before you yet, but I'll send out a horse to meet you, which will save you a bit," and, so saying, the dragoon set spurs to his horse and galloped off with his news.

And now, as Maurice neared the laager, it was evident that all the preparations for the march had been suddenly suspended. His former acquaintance met him with a led horse.

"Jump on," he cried; "the general wants to see you immediately. You are upsetting all the programme," he continued

laughing; "the orders are for the camp to stand fast while the rocket-troop and horse artillery go forward and search all this long grass right and left of us."

Thus adjured Maurice swung himself into the saddle, and, guided by his new friend, found himself in less than a quarter-of-an hour at the laager.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

Excitement in Etshowe ran high that morning. It was pretty well known, two hours after daybreak by the garrison that Maurice Enderby had been despatched to carry a message to the relieving column. Would he get through, was the question at that moment in all men's mouths. They would soon know now. Had not Captain Chamberlain said that if Mr. Enderby won his way through safely the heliograph of their friends would be easy to understand. At length the well-

known flashes were once more discerned, and from those entrusted with the signalling, suddenly came forth a ringing cheer. Even the veteran commandant's stern features relaxed as he said, "Read it out to them, Chamberlain, read it out."

"Shall be with you to-morrow, Enderby safe!" and then the cheer of that small party on the ramparts in charge of the signalling was re-echoed by the throats of the whole garrison, who knew now that their wearied leaguer was over, and that they should henceforth meet the foe in the open. Full rations were served out immediately, and the whole garrison perked up and discussed jauntily the likelihood of their commencing the offensive and of making a sharp sortie to assist their deliverers.

Maurice meanwhile had made his report to the general commanding, who had quickly decided what to do. Finding there was no

immediate necessity for reaching Etshowe that night, he determined to advance leisurely, searching the ground on his front and on his flanks rigorously as he proceeded. He felt very little doubt that he should have to fight the Zulu army before he reached the fort; it should be to-day if they chose, but if not he intended to join hands with the Etshowe garrison on the morrow, though all Zululand stood in his path.

"You have done your mission very well, Mr. Enderby," he said, as Maurice finished his narrative; "and now after your riding for your life to get out of the place you will have to take a turn with us and fight your way in again. You say you saw no large bodies of the enemy?"

"Mere pickets, sir, about thirty in the first instance and not more than six or eight in the second, but we had little doubt at Etshowe that the besieging force had been withdrawn

to meet you, and from what I saw, I should say you would come across them some five or six miles from here;" and then Maurice was dismissed in charge of an aide-de-camp, who contrived to furnish him with a tolerable breakfast, which went far to cement their acquaintance.

The camp broke up, and the long column crept cautiously along the track, covered by a clould of skirmishers with a rocket-troop and horse artillery. Right and left flew the rockets, while the shells dropped here and there into the mealie fields, and now and again into the long grass, and as they crept on it became speedily apparent that, although carefully masked, the enemy were in considerable force in front of them. They did not like the shells, still bore them with tolerable equanimity, but the rockets seemed to demoralise them, and more than once considerable numbers broke from their cover

and retreated with more rapidity than military etiquette sanctions.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the general as he caught sight of a strong body of the dusky foe, retiring in a manner that almost savoured of flight. "What a dressing we will give these fellows to-morrow morning, if they will only stand. Signal to Etshowe to make a sortie in their rear as soon as the sound of our guns tells them we are thoroughly engaged."

Steadily the advance continued, the Zulus retiring before them as they pushed onward. That the enemy was in considerable force there could be little doubt. He was evidently extremely anxious to conceal his numbers. The rockets and shells here and there forced small bodies to abandon the cover, and discover themselves, but it was always very temporarily, and the mass of the foe had carefully refrained from exhibiting itself.

Still no soldier could fail to understand that he was driving a large force of the enemy before him, neither routed nor demoralised but retiring leisurely in their own fashion and for their own reasons.

"These fellows don't mean to let us get to Etshowe without fighting," said the general, "but they mean to fight on ground of their own choosing; they can't surely be such fools as to make their stand under the guns of the fort. What do you think, Mr. Enderby," he continued, "can you make any guess where they will fix their stand?"

"Not in the least, sir," replied Maurice, "but, from what I've seen of them, they won't retire much further before they attack."

When they had arrived within some nine or ten miles of Etshowe the general sounded a halt, and, although it was only midday, gave the order to laager and encamp for

the night. He confided to his staff that his men would be all fresh by these means for a night attack, and if the enemy did not think fit to make that he would have a long day before him to fight his way through to the walls of Etshowe. The camp was formed with the greatest possible care. Pickets and scouts were thrown out around it, and the strictest vigilance enjoined on all those whose duty it was to watch. They had had a long afternoon in which to prepare, and, as the general at sundown made his final rounds in person, he felt confident that, in the event of a night attack, his foes would be, so to speak, running their heads against a brick wall.

Maurice stretched himself under a waggon by the side of his new friend, who, curiously enough, turned out to be a younger brother of Bob Grafton. A more light-hearted dragoon than Charlie Grafton never held her

Majesty's commission, and when the two had made each other out they fraternized immediately.

"It's a precious little bit of earth this old planet of ours," laughed the dragoon as he lit his pipe. "If you're only a sociable beggar you can't go anywhere without tumbling over somebody you know. Lord! how often I've heard Bob talk of you. He was never tired of telling the story of Mrs. Enderby's wedding present. But I say, how did you come out here? you were in a very different line the last time I heard of you."

"Yes," said Maurice, as a cloud of smoke rolled from under his moustache, "I started in the wrong groove. Pray don't think I've a word to say against religion simply because I found I wasn't fit to be one of its ministers. As an old friend of your brothers and mine said, 'You may

make a dragoon, but you'll never make a parson.' A fellow must be made for something in this world, and I'm trying to see whether he is right."

"Jolliest life out," replied the other. "whether on service or in garrison; but you must get into the regulars, you know. Just at present, I take it, you belong to nothing?"

"No," said Maurice, "I'm a sort of half orderly, half aide-de-camp, with no exact position. However the chief is very good to me, and usually finds me something to do."

"I suppose you can't guess where these fellows will make their stand?"

"Well, I fancy that they did mean that you should have marched into the middle of them by this, but the general is too old a hand for that. The advance was much too guarded to have fallen into an ambuscade.

I think, judging from past experience, that we shall hear plenty of them before morning."

"Ah, well! they won't find us asleep, and it ought to cost them pretty dear if they venture to attack the laager. Good-night." And rolling himself in his cloak Charlie Grafton was speedily wrapped in slumber.

Maurice soon followed his example, and, tired out more by the excitement than the fatigues of the day, slept soundly. He was awoke by a hand being laid on his arm, and looking up found the dragoon stooping over him.

"The word's passed," he said, "to stand to our arms. One or two of the picket have just come in with a message from the officer in charge, to the effect that he believes the enemy to be closing in in force on our front and right flank."

"Let's creep out and have a look at

them," replied Maurice, springing to his feet, and in another two or three minutes he and Charlie Grafton had passed without the improvised walls of their temporary citadel, and were stealing along through the rough, coarse grass that surrounded it.

The training of the last few weeks stood Maurice in good stead. He had a keen eye for their subtle enemy, and was quick to detect these dusky warriors, as, taking advantage of every bit of cover, they crept within springing distance of their foes. They had not gone far before he suddenly gripped Grafton's arm, and then, crouching on his knees, whispered—

"Hist! they're coming and no mistake. I'm dreadfully afraid they have got round the picket. I can swear I saw a fellow slip behind that big boulder about fifty yards in front of us. Ah!" he continued, "the game's begun, as three or four rifle-shots

rang sharp and shrill on the night air. A hoarse cry of—"Stand to your arms," was heard from the laager, and in another instant rapid flashing of the rifles showed that the pickets were in quick retreat all round.

"Come along, we must run for it, we're only in the way out here."

They didn't start a minute too soon, and it was well for them that they had not far to go, for scores of their active foes started from the grass behind them and came bounding forward in pursuit. As they regained the laager, the bugle sounded the "fire," and in another second their side of the square became a blaze of musketry. The Zulus now came on openly and in great numbers. Many of them were armed with rifles, which perhaps rather served to lessen the dash of their attack, insomuch as, understanding nothing about "the sights," their

fire was comparatively innocuous, and not so much to be dreaded as the terrible assegais at close quarters. Still, mowed down though they were, they advanced with unflinching resolution; reckless of the deadly rifle fire that decimated them or of the murderous discharges of grape poured in from the guns at the salients, they fought their way determinedly up to the waggons, and sent a very cloud of assegais among the defenders. So determined were their rushes that more than once a small party obtained a footing within the camp, only however to perish to a man.

It was in one of these rushes that Charlie Grafton, who, at the head of some of his dismounted dragoons, had been doing good service on the like occasions, came perilously near making an end of it. Having emptied his revolver he threw himself, sabre in hand, in front of a gigantic chief who was

leading the assault; as he made a furious lunge at his foe his foot slipped, and the Zulu, taking advantage of the accident, sprang within his guard, and, quick as lightning, dashed him to the ground; shortening his assegai, with a fierce yell, he was about to drive it through the prostrate man when Maurice's sabre swung keenly through the air, and the Zulu fell dead over his victim, with a fearful sword-cut in the head. But his followers closed rapidly in upon Enderby, and, ere his own people could interfere, Maurice fell, bleeding and prostrate, across the body of his late antagonist. A few minutes and the luckless Zulus had paid the penalty of their brief success, and the victors had a few minutes' time in which to reckon up their losses.

"This one's got it bad," exclaimed a bluff infantry serjeant as he picked up Maurice and drew him clear of the little

ring of killed and wounded; "it's the gentleman who came in from Etshowe; fetch a doctor here some of you; he's grit, every inch of him, and has been right in the thick of it all along."

"Confound it! Pull this black brute off the top of me, can't you?" exclaimed a voice somewhat impatiently from close beside them.

"Hurrah, lads!" cried a stalwart young trooper, as, with the assistance of a comrade, he tumbled the dead chief quickly on one side; "it's Mr. Grafton. May I never, sir, but I thought you was done. I could have sworn I saw that big Zulu send his spear right through you!"

"Done be d——d!" replied Charlie Grafton, shaking himself very much after the manner of a small dog who has been tumbled over in the roadside by a bigger of his species; "not but what I should

have been if Mr. Enderby hadn't been a little quicker to chip in on my side than you fellows were. Where is he?"

"He's here, sir," replied the serjeant; "but I doubt he's badly hurt."

"By Jove! I hope not," retorted Charlie. "He saved me, and I trust——but here comes the doctor."

Young Grafton was a little fellow gifted with unbounded animal spirits, unflinching pluck, and untiring go. Foremost in every description of sport, and equally keen when it came to campaigning, regarding a "crumpler" after a jackal, a wet bivouac, a wearisome march, and a hard day's fighting, as all in the day's work, and things to be rather laughed at than otherwise. The "irrepressible sub." as his brother officers had christened this vivacious young gentleman, was an immense favourite in his regiment. The men of his troop, whom he was

accustomed to address in a polite slang of his own, not in the least warranted by Her Majesty's regulations, would do anything for him, although they could never quite refrain from grinning when he pitched into them in his racy vernacular, and they were most unmistakeably glad now that "little cheeky," as they called him, had not come to grief.

Charlie Grafton is silent enough though now. For once his voluble tongue is stilled, and he anxiously awaits what the doctor has to say about this new friend of only some few hours ago. Maurice lies very still; his face pale, and the blood wells fitfully from the wound in his side. Quick as thought the keen surgical scissors rip open his patrol jacket. The surgeon takes a sponge, and gently wipes away the blood.

"An ugly wound," he mutters, "but, as

far as I can judge, there is no internal hemorrhage"

"Do you think he'll live?" inquired Grafton, anxiously.

"Hard to say as yet," replied the surgeon, "but it doesn't look to me at all a hopeless case. Carry him across to the hospital-waggon at once and then I must set to work to stanch this bleeding. By his looks he should have youth and a good constitution on his side, and that goes for a good deal."

For more than an hour did the Zulus persist in their assault. At last they could stand the punishment so relentlessly dealt out to them no longer, and retired in sullen disorder. No attempt was made to pursue them, and when the day broke the thickly strewn dead showed how terrible the carnage had been, and with what gallantry and recklessness of life the assault had been persisted in. There had been fierce hand-to-

hand fighting outside the laager, and the relieving column could boast no bloodless victory. One of the most popular chiefs of the rifles had fallen while cheering his battalion to victory, and several officers of lower rank, to say nothing of the rank and file, attested to the severity of the struggle.

As the sun rose high in the heavens the heliograph from Etshowe flashed congratulations on the victory, which the garrison had already rightly interpreted from the steady and persistent firing.

"The battle's over," said the Etshowe commandant, who was anxiously watching from his ramparts the angry flashes of the guns. "No savages that ever were could have succeeded against such a continuous roll of musketry as that. The Zulus, gentlemen, will trouble *us* no longer."

CHAPTER XII.

THE NEWS COMES HOME.

Bessie had retired to Tunnleton to spend her temporary widowhood. It was near London and she could count now upon a few staunch friends there; General Shrewster, the Chyltons, and especially the Molecombes, could all be reckoned upon to welcome her kindly. The Praun faction had hardly done rubbing their hands and chuckling over Maurice's Ascot misfortunes when they were staggered by the intelli-

gence that he had started as a volunteer in the Zulu war, and, though the veterans at first pooh-poohed the notion and declared that more useless lumber than volunteers, who knew nothing of their duties, never hampered a general, yet they were rather put down on this point by one of their own caste. Shrewster had had a turn at the Cape during the Kaffir War and therefore could speak with some authority upon present affairs in Zululand.

"It's all very well to call them live lumber, Praun, but I tell you that any active young fellow who can ride, has a stout heart, a keen pair of eyes, and brains in his head, is well worth his salt out there. I'd ask for nothing better than three or four hundred such fellows as Maurice Enderby to mould into a regiment of irregular horse. They'd be rare scouts at the end of a few months, and, though roughish

troopers to look at and of no use opposed to regulars, yet they'd be a valuable contingent in cutting up barbarians like the Zulus."

That the peppery Praun should dissent from this opinion need scarcely be observed, but then he disagreed with most people's, and even at times turned round upon himself. Still, General Shrewster was a man entitled to speak with authority; he had seen, in his time, more hard fighting than either Generals Maddox or Praun could lay claim to, and Tunnleton, as a rule, stood a little in awe of his quiet, self-possessed manner.

As for Bessie, hers was the fate of all women linked to the brethren of the sword. Great Britain, like ancient Rome, is embroiled by perpetual wars. There is always hot water simmering in some of our numerous dependencies; a few lives are lost, and we

hardly heed it, it is only when the simmer becomes a boil and the fingers of the cooks who are managing our affairs get grievously burnt, in short when disaster overtakes us and we hurry out all the available troops we can lay our hands on to avenge our outraged authority, that we begin to recognise we are really at war. Bessie's fate was in one respect hard. Her husband was under no orders but had proceeded to the banks of the Tugela of his own free will, and Maurice in this had been guided altogether by General Shrewster's advice.

"The great thing, my dear Enderby, is to be early in the field. Buy such kit as you think desirable, I should suggest the following," and here followed a list of articles such as from his former experience General Shrewster thought might be found useful. "I will forward you two or three letters of introduction to old friends of mine in high

position at the front. I am sure they will advance your views and give you every chance. Luck, and your own right hand, must do the rest."

So far Maurice's luck seemed to have terminated with an assegai through his ribs, but this news had not as yet reached Tunnleton.

That the many warriors at the club followed the campaign with close interest may be easily imagined, and if there was one thing irritated these critics it was the tardiness with which the disaster of Isandhlwana was being avenged. They were loud in their condemnation of the military chief out there, and in this respect they differed but little from the press and the rest of the country. The war indeed was beginning to assume proportions in the eyes of the public to which it was by no means entitled, and that the enemy, though numerous and after

their fashion disciplined, were unskilled in the use of the rifle and destitute of artillery ran some danger of being forgotten. Our leaders out there were no doubt in some measure afraid to risk their *prestige* till reinforcements should make success a matter beyond doubt.

At length came home intelligence of the relief of Etshowe, and a brief account of the fierce night-attack on the relieving column by the Zulu army which had immediately preceded it.

Bessie had good reason to believe that her husband was shut up in that fort. She knew that he had joined number one column, that he had been taken, as he himself described it, as half orderly, half aide-de-camp, by the officer commanding that force, who was an old friend of General Shrewster's. From himself she had received no letters since, but it was natural to suppose that he had shared the fate of

those with whom his lot was thrown. It had taken much to reconcile her to his change of profession, but she had schooled herself to it at last, even to the fact that his only possibility of entering the army was by the way of active service. Even that did not quite come home to her until it came to the saying "good-bye," and then poor Bessie gave way utterly. Still he had promised to write frequently, and that he should be in a position in which it would be impossible to keep his word was a thing she had never dreamt of. At first when his letters ceased she felt sure something must have happened to him; but then General Shrewster pointed out to her that there was no post running from Etshowe, and that till it was relieved it was impossible she could hear.

But by-and-by came fuller details—the graphic account of the battle almost within

sight of Etshowe—how want of food was beginning to stare the garrison in the face, and that in short, had its relief been much longer delayed, its defenders would have had nothing for it but to sell their lives as dearly as they could. There was a long roll of the casualties which had taken place during the siege, and also a list of the killed and wounded of the relieving force, and in neither of these was any mention made of Maurice Enderby.

Besides his wife and his friends there was another person much dismayed at hearing nothing of Maurice, to wit, the impalpable WE, who controlled a leading London journal.

The fresh brilliant letters from "Our Own Correspondent in Zululand" had just arrested public attention, when, to the editorial disgust, they suddenly ceased. They had not much doubt at the office of the Heliograph

as to what had become of their correspondent; but then, as the editor testily remarked—

"That's the worst of these young hands. Freshness and real power of description do not compensate for their ignorance of their duties as journalists on the war-path. His first duty," continued this enthusiast, "is to his paper; his queen and his country must for the time be a secondary consideration, and especially should he be careful to avoid getting shut up in such places as Etshowe. A correspondent inside such a city as Paris may be doing good work, but what can there be to tell about the siege of a mere frontier fort?"

Many a mail was destined to pass before the ruler of the Heliograph received another letter from Maurice Enderby.

Bessie's first news of her husband came from Bob Grafton. She was astonished one morning by his unexpected arrival.

"I make no apology," he exclaimed, "for darting in upon you at this early hour, but the fact is I am down in the neighbourhood for a few days, and have come to hear the latest news of Maurice."

"I am very very anxious about him, Mr. Grafton," she rejoined; "I have heard nothing from him since, I presume, he was shut up in Etshowe; and, though it is now relieved, he is still silent. His name, thank heaven! is not mentioned among the killed and wounded. You are staying at Bridge Court, I suppose?"

"Just so," replied Grafton. He was not, but he did not wish Mrs. Enderby to know that he had travelled down from the north expressly to tell her of her husband's mischance. "I can't help thinking, Mrs. Enderby," he continued, "that my news of Maurice may be later than yours. You don't seem to be aware how he has dis-

tinguished himself. I had a letter the other day from my brother Charlie. As you know, he is a horse-soldier in those parts, and oddly enough has come across your husband; in short, Charlie is indebted to him for his life."

"His life! Your brother! To Maurice! Pray explain, Mr. Grafton," and Bessie's big brown eyes glistened with excitement.

"The shortest way is to read you Charlie's letter," replied Grafton, "always premising that Charlie, though peculiar in his phraseology, is accurate in the main. He is a sanguine young beggar, and takes life's croppers pretty lightly—now for his letter."

"Dear Bob,

"If you're not anxious you ought to be about how I am getting on in these parts, and it will soothe your agitated feelings to know that my scalp is not as yet whitening in a Zulu lodge. I don't know that he

cared about my scalp, but a very long Zulu most decidedly went for my midriff the other day, and, but for your old friend Maurice Enderby, would have probably extinguished one of the dawning lights of the British army. By Jove! that fellow's born to good luck. He's done a thing that has set everyone's tongue wagging. It seems they were getting rather hard up for grub in Etshowe, and, not being able to understand our signals, they gazetted Enderby honorary postman and sent him forth to tell us to 'hurry up.' Well! dashed if he didn't ride clean through the Zulu army, and come off with only the loss of his horse. It was a plucky thing to do, no doubt; and he showed plenty of head and judgment in doing it, but it was luck after all that pulled him through. Of course, a man who started with half the 'Wandering Nun' as a wedding gift is bound to throw sixes. He had

one or two turns up with the Zulus on his way, and, from the little he has said about his ride, they were bad for the Zulus. However, poor fellow, just now he has thrown deuce ace.

"I must tell you how it was, Bob—Enderby told us when he came in, that the Zulus were swarming between us and Etshowe; and that we weren't likely to get there without a fight. Well, we couldn't bring 'em to book all that morning. They kept on retreating slowly before us; and, at last, our general made up his mind to halt for the night and have it out with them the next morning. A little before daybreak they came on like wolves; and, although we rolled them over in scores before they could close, they weren't to be denied. A few of them broke into our laager four or five times, and it was in stopping one of these rushes that your distinguished brother

nearly came to grief. He was too big, Bob, and I ought to have left him to some one nearer his own weight; but, in spite of the lickings I used to get at school, I always pique myself upon my science, and thought I could pink the fellow before he could close. That was not destined to be decided, for my foot slipped, and before I knew where I was I was dashed to the ground, saw a spear gleam high in the air, and felt that I was about to be spitted like a cockchafer, when Maurice suddenly chipped in with his sabre, and most obligingly dropped my big friend on the top of me. Being undermost, I saw no more, but conclude it was a sharp and merry mill while it lasted. When it ended, I am sorry to say, poor Enderby was at the top of the heap, having received a very awkward poke in the ribs from one of our black entertainers.

"Joking apart, I am sorry to say that

Enderby is seriously wounded. Remember, the doctors by no means say that he will not pull through, but make no disguise about his situation being critical. We have brought him on to Etshowe, where he'll have to stay for the present, but I suppose they'll send him down to Marietzburg as soon as they can move him."

Bessie listened in rapt attention as Grafton read, her eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed at the accounts of Maurice's ride, only to turn pale as death as the next few lines bore record of his being struck down.

"Wounded!" she exclaimed, in a low tone, in a critical state. "I must go to him; Mr. Grafton you must help me in this. As Maurice's dearest friend you will, won't you? Where is it they are taking him? Marie—Marietzburg. I must go there, and, oh! my God, if I should arrive too late," and here her sobs choked Bessie's utterance.

Like most men, there was nothing discomposed Bob Grafton more than a woman's tears, and it was in somewhat clumsy fashion he set himself to console the stricken woman before him.

"Of course I'll help you, Mrs. Enderby, but you mustn't take that view of it. Men get seriously hurt on these occasions no doubt, but most of them recover and in a marvellously short time too. By the time you reach Marietzburg you will find the only thing the matter with Maurice will be that he cannot get enough to eat. Your convalescents are always very cormorants."

"God grant it may be so," said Bessie, smiling sadly through her tears. "I shall trust every thing to you, and you'll lose no time, will you?"

"I'm off to town by the next train," said Grafton, "to take your passage, if possible, in the next ship that sails. Make your pre-

parations at once so as to be in readiness to join me in London as soon as I write to you; and now, for the present, good-bye."

"By Jove!" thought Grafton, "I do hope Maurice is all right. It would be an awful thing for this poor little woman if she should get up to Marietzburg only to find that her husband is dead and she left all alone in the world," and, looking more serious than was his wont, Grafton made his way rapidly to the station.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONVALESCENCE.

The sun is pouring down upon the dusty streets of Marietzburg; the queer little colonial town is swarming with a tumultuous, perspiring crowd, wanting apparently everything. In busy search of accommodation for man or beast, of food, of tobacco, and of strong waters; much curiosity manifested, indeed, about this latter, as the military authorities have interposed some restrictions on their sale. Bluff teamsters,

with their heavy ox-waggons laden with provisions, wearily working their way to the front; commissariat officers vainly endeavouring to hurry them forward; soldiers striving to discover billets that only exist in their imagination; officers in charge of them hurrying here and there in the endeavour to keep these tired sheep in hand, and also to feed them; a reek of tobacco, a buzz of language more pungent than classical, strange oaths, with a strong flavour of Dutch in them, and athletic blacks lounging about clothed in a sparse caricature of European costume. Such constitute the crowd that throng the streets of Marietzburg on this summer day. It is much the same as might be written of most towns of which the supplies of an army were being hurried to the front.

For the chiefs of the Cape had been spurred to extra exertion by the recent

receipt of telegraph messages from their friends at home. The great democracy of England had risen in its wrath, like that of Athens of old, or like that later sterner democracy which in its death struggle of nearly a quarter of a century ago changed its generals pretty nearly as soon as they were beaten. There was no more singular feature in the gigantic civil war in America than the rapidity with which the Northern States discarded their unsuccessful leaders. In like manner our military chiefs in Zululand were told by their friends in England that their successors were on their way, that the public were weary of their inactivity, that the English people in these days of telegraphs were impatient of reverses to their arms, unless speedily avenged. It was rumoured that a wire had come to the English general from a distinguished relative to this effect —

"Fight! above all fight! You'd better

take a licking than continue this strategy, which is jeered at as an *armed neutrality*."

That Sir Garnet Wolseley and a band of his favoured henchmen were on their way was well-known in the colony. Already the war correspondents had pronounced Zululand the grave of military reputations; one and all, from the general down to the junior brigadier, felt that it was incumbent to strike a fatal blow before the new men came upon the scene. The waves favoured them, and, thanks to the surf at Durban, the victory of Ulundi took place in time to rehabilitate many a bespattered military name.

At a window on the first floor of a sort of half villa, half farm-house in the suburbs, looking out over the burnt-up rolling prairie ground, sat Maurice Enderby. The pale face and sunken eyes showed that it had gone hard with him, and the thick black beard that now garnished his chin would

have made the good people of Tunnleton stare at their late curate. Not that the brethren of the surplice by any means eschew beard and moustache in these days, but Tunnleton was an old-world place full of old-world prejudices, and about a quarter of a century behind the times, and one of its axioms was that its divines should be clean-shaved. Maurice is chafing terribly at his enforced idleness. He knows that he has distinguished himself, but he knows equally well that, if the first step in life is to attract the eyes of the chiefs of your vocation, the second is to keep yourself constantly before them. But no—the doctor says it will be six good weeks before he will be able to take the saddle again; and, what is worse, he feels that it is true.

A light step behind him arrests his attention, and Bessie glides quietly to his side with a tray containing nourishment of some

kind. He looks fondly up at her as he says—

"Ah, Bess! if it hadn't been for your nursing I don't think I should have pulled through; and, though I fret here horribly at my enforced idleness, still I don't know if I was well to-morrow what I am to do."

"Do?" she replied, though her voice shook and her lips quivered as she said it. "You would rejoin your old chief, of course."

"Yes, no doubt that is what I ought to do from one point of view; but what's to become of you?"

"Me?" replied Bessie, with a rather forced laugh; "oh, I shall stop here, with my heart in my mouth, so as to be all ready when my services are required again."

Maurice looked at her for a moment, and then said,

"Ah, Bessie, Bessie, you will never make a soldier's wife."

"I don't know about that," replied Bessie, as the tears welled up in her eyes; "I don't think I have made a very bad beginning. I made what you call a forced march out here, and even the doctor says I am a capable nurse."

"Capable nurse!" exclaimed Maurice, "I should think you were indeed. Why the doctor told me the other day that I owed my life to your unceasing vigilance."

"I did my best," she replied meekly, "but, ah, Maurice, after snatching you from the very jaws of death can you wonder that the brine comes into my eyes at the idea of your going to the front again? Stop, let me finish!" she continued, as he was about to speak; "do not think that I wish to dissuade you from it. We made a false start, but you have now begun a new

career, and I know that if a soldier is to make his mark in his profession he must not neglect his opportunities."

"Spoken like a sensible little woman," he rejoined, "and you'll promise ——"

"Not to be more foolish than I can help," she interrupted; "but, Maurice, I cannot be a Spartan matron, and am afraid I shall always cry a little when you go forth to battle."

"Pooh!" he said, laughing, "you must look upon me as insured. I have been hit once, and the odds are they won't hit me again."

"There's very little consolation in that," she replied, smiling, "but one comfort is, that you're not fit to start yet, and it is possible all this may be over before you are in the saddle again."

"And if it is," said Maurice, a little bitterly, "I shall have come all this way

for nothing—and I know now Shrewster was right: I have the makings of a decent dragoon in me."

"Well crowed, Mr. Enderby," said a voice from the doorway; "when men feel that way they are bad to kill, and I'm thinking ye'll do now, but, as for making a dacent dragoon, I'd me doubts as to your ever doing that some few weeks back. Ah, Mrs. Enderby, your patient's a credit to you! Feed him, ma'am, feed him with flesh, fowl, and good red wine. All we've got to do now is to re-make the blood the Zulus let out."

"Well, Dr. Gabbet," said Bessie, "he can't complain about that, and he is becoming now a capital patient, for he's always ready to eat."

"It's the way with them all, ma'am; they're always anxious to make up for the time they lost during the fever; but you'll

be asking me for news; they are all playing now the game of catch who catch can. There's the general-commanding doing all he can to get up to Ulundi before Sir Garnet Wolseley can join him; there's Sir Garnet doing all he knows to join him before he gets up to Ulundi; and here's Cetewayo doing all he knows to be 'not-at-home' to either of them."

"And how will it all end?" asked Maurice, laughing.

"Well, the deuce a one of them knows! It'll be bad for Sir Garnet if he don't catch 'em, it'll be worse for Thesiger if he is caught, and it'll be worst of all for Cetewayo when they happen to catch him; there ye are, sir, and there's never another man in the colony could have explained the position of affairs so tersely or so clearly as Mick Gabbet, though it's meself says so."

"But as soon as they have got Ulundi

it'll be all over, doctor, eh?" said Mrs. Enderby.

"Tear an' ages, ma'am, don't think so manely of the natives! They're like me own countrymen, they can't get on without their divarsions, and, as soon as the fighting's done in one place, they just set it going again in another. There's a broth of a boy called Sikukuni who has been trailing his coat these last three years, and we have to polish him off as soon as we have time to do so."

"Ah, that's the fellow we've never succeeded in doing anything with. He's got a tremendous stronghold of his own, I believe, hasn't he?"

"That's just it," said the doctor, with a wink; "we've taken out a judgment summons and tried to put in a 'man-in-possession' a good many times, but he's as hard to deal with as a Galway squire; and now

I'm off. Feed him up, Mrs. Enderby, feed him up, and he'll soon be strong on his legs again."

It was dull work this convalescence at Marietzburg, but Maurice shook off his weariness considerably when Dr. Gabbet at length sanctioned his going for a short afternoon ride. From that out the horses came round every afternoon, and, accompanied by Bessie, Maurice indulged in a good canter when the sun began to sink.

And now came the news of the fierce fight of Ulundi, where the Zulus fought their last battle in defence of their capital. That their defeat was crushing, their power broke, their army dispersed, and their king a fugitive, was speedily apparent as the sequence of this victory. Carping critics urged that it might have been done before, and there were cynics who chuckled with amusement because for once Sir Garnet had

been too late. But, although the Zulus were effectually conquered, there was plenty of work to be done in restoring order through the land, and it was said pretty openly that our own troops, flushed with their triumphs and successful campaign, had not yet been able to divest themselves of the idea that they were in an enemy's country, and, though they had recrossed the Tugela, were levying supplies with a high hand. There were rumours, too, of coming troubles in the Transvaal. The Boers, who had never been satisfied with annexation, were holding mass-meetings, at which the speakers once more claimed their independence. Sikukuni, with whom we had been carrying on a desultory war for months, was getting more restless and encroaching than usual. This marauder, who was a sort of South African Rob Roy, displayed laudable impartiality in his raids.

Cattle-lifting was apparently his chief industry, and whether they were the cattle of Boers or British owners he never troubled his head to consider. The Boers had striven vainly to cope with him, and all attempts on our part to put him down had so far failed chiefly from the insufficiency of the force employed against him. Every available soldier had been wanted in Zululand, and, though the officer in charge of this suppression had once actually led his small force within a mile of Sikukuni's citadel, yet that pest of South Africa, a murrain amongst the horses, had compelled him to retire. The battle of Ulundi had set free the greater part of the army in Zululand, and Sir Garnet now found himself able to turn his attention to these minor matters, and it was not likely that the chastisement of the marauding Sikukuni would be overlooked.

By this time Maurice was thoroughly

restored, and, though he looked a bit pulled down, declared he was as good a man as ever. He had written to his old chief, reported himself quite fit for service, and begging to be allowed to resume his former post on his personal staff, and in due time received a letter which occasioned him no little elation.

"DEAR ENDERBY"—it ran—

"I am delighted to hear you are all right again. When I last saw you outside Etshowe the doctors spoke gravely of your case, and I was sorry to hear that you had a bad attack of fever consequent on your wound afterwards. However I am truly glad that you are at last safe out of the wood. I should be only too glad to have you back with me, but it is all over up here. Ulundi completely crushed the Zulu nation, at all events for the time. The sole thing doing is the pursuit of Cetewayo, and,

though no doubt you would ask nothing better, we have dozens of volunteers for that work, and he will probably be captured before you could possibly arrive here. No; I can do better for you than that; the man who cut his way through the Zulu army is never likely to want employment. I have managed to get you transferred to General W.'s staff, who will be shortly settling with that very troublesome chief Sikukuni. He is just the man to appreciate a bit of dash like yours, and you need never fear you won't see fighting under him; he revels in it, and will work his brigade into the thick of it somehow.

"Make your way to him at once; he's somewhere now, I think, in the neighbourhood of Luneberg; but he is not the man to dawdle when he has got his force together.

"Good-bye, I wish you every luck.

"Yours sincerely, F. P."

"Your name is mentioned in despatches, and I am glad to say your exploit thought highly of by every one."

At this moment Bessie entered the room. One glance at her husband's delighted face, another at the letter he held in his hand, told her all. She knew that she had again to wish him good-bye.

CHAPTER XIV.

TUNNLETON CHANGES ITS OPINION.

Tunnleton was much excited when the story of Maurice's exploit appeared in the papers. That he had gone out as a volunteer to Zululand and that he had been severely wounded, Tunnleton was aware; that Mrs. Enderby had started at two or three days' notice for the purpose of nursing her husband was also currently known; but Bessie had seen but two or three of her intimate friends before leaving, and, except

General Shrewster and Edith Molecombe, nobody had heard the details contained in Grafton's letters. But Maurice's brother correspondents were proud to put on record such a deed of daring—achieved, too, by one of their guild. Individual heroism is always telling in a war correspondent's letter, and it really was extraordinary the manner in which Maurice had made his way through the Zulus.

There is a great deal of the Pumblechook element about in this world! and Tunnleton, which not a year ago had cast him out from among them, now almost claimed Enderby as a fellow-citizen. It is astonishing when you have succeeded in this world the number of people who are always convinced you "had it in you." It is true they had kept this knowledge carefully to themselves in the early part of your career, but they remind you of it now you have achieved fame,

all the oftener, it is to be presumed, by way of making up for lost time. Tunnleton has quite made its mind now to regard Maurice as one of her own sons, and people vie with each other in exchanging reminiscences of the ex-curate's sayings and doings while resident amongst them. Although a reticent man, General Shrewster could not refrain from crowing a little over the exploits of his *protégé*.

"Aha! Praun," he exclaimed, "didn't I always tell you young Enderby would make a rattling dragoon?"

"I don't know that you did," snapped that irascible warrior, "but I am sure that I never said anything to the contrary. I only said that he was guilty of great impropriety of conduct as a curate. There are people," he continued snappishly, "who don't see any harm in gambling and horse-racing—I do," and to avoid rejoinder

General Praun left the club morning-room a little precipitately.

It soon further leaked out that the spirited letters of some few weeks back in the Heliograph were from the pen of the dashing young volunteer, who had carried the message from Etshowe, and then the Reverend Mr. Jarrow could no longer contain himself. The rector positively glowed with enthusiasm, and in the course of two or three days had thoroughly persuaded himself that he had no little to do with their composition.

"Excellent, sir, so full of fire and vigour. I am proud to think that I first guided his steps in the path of literature; I looked over his early efforts when he was here and gave him the benefit of my advice and suggestions; I lent him the 'Verity Letters' to read, and I don't know — now does it strike you?—but it seems to me that he caught my style a good deal.

Now these letters in the Heliograph are characterised by a good deal of that vigorous thought and power of sarcasm which you may have observed in my own poor efforts," and the mock humility that characterised the rector as he uttered the concluding words was beautiful to witness.

On one point Tunnleton was unanimous, and that was, in their anxiety to hear tidings of the wounded man. Even those whose tongues had been most bitter against him were desirous to hear he was doing well. There could be no doubt he had done something of which his countrymen might well be proud, and most of us sink our dislikes when their object has come to grief on the battle-field.

A man who, rather to his astonishment, found himself suddenly a person of considerable importance in Tunnleton was Bob Grafton; he was staying for a few days, after his wont, at Bridge Court, and he walked

into Tunnleton two or three times to call on Miss Molecombe, General Shrewster, and two or three other friends he had made of late in the little town. He had often walked in from Bridge Court before, and Tunnleton scarcely heeded his presence, in fact barely knew him by sight. But now, much to his surprise, he was constantly stopped by people, strangers to him, anxious to know if he had any news of Mr. Enderby. The first news of Maurice's mischance had come from him, and Tunnleton very naturally thought there was much likelihood of his hearing again—and Tunnleton was right.

It was during his stay at Bridge Court that the next news of Maurice came across the sea, and the letter was once more to Bob Grafton. This time it was Mrs. Enderby who wrote. There was a brief record of her journey out to begin with, and what kindness she had received in making

her way up to Marietzburg; how she had found Maurice slowly struggling back to life after a severe attack of fever; how that he was now almost himself again; and, whether they knew it or not in England, that he was reckoned a hero out there.

"And now, Mr. Grafton," she continued, "comes the terrible hardship of being a soldier's wife. I have nursed him till his step is as firm and his figure as erect as ever it was; and now he is once more going to bid me good-bye. He has got what he calls another chance, and I suppose he ought to take it, but we poor women know what such chances are, and what a wailing the result of them means to us. I shall bear it, this time, worse than I did before, for the evil I dreaded has already once befallen me, and I shall tremble at the thought that it may do so again. One comfort is, that this time I shall be near at hand should he com-

to harm. Tell General Shrewster that Maurice is going with a column to beat up Sikukuni's quarters. He is not exactly a Zulu, as far as I can make out, but seems to be an independent freebooter who revels in little wars on his own account; at all events he has been giving a deal of trouble, and, so far, seems to have got the best of those who have been despatched to bring him to account. Good-bye. Love from us both to all old friends, especially the Chyltons, Edith Molecombe, and General Shrewster.

"Sincerely yours,

"Bessie Enderby."

An idea flashed across Bob Grafton when he had finished this epistle, and that was, that he could not do better than call upon Miss Molecombe and read her Mrs. Enderby's letter. He had got rather into the way of dropping into the banker's about luncheon time of late, and the Misses

Balders rallied him not a little as to what was the attraction in Tunnleton.

Another thing too that was absorbing a good deal of Mr. Grafton's attention at this time was the approaching Leger. It may be remembered that Grafton had made arrangements on Maurice's behalf for the Ascot settling. Enderby had let no time grow under his feet, and a little more than a week after that disastrous meeting had sailed for the Cape. Hampton had readily acquiesced in Grafton's offer, namely, of taking nearly two-thirds of the debt, and allowing the remainder to stand over for some little time; and it was to the big race on Doncaster Moor that Grafton looked for the recovery, so to speak, of those Ascot losses. The "Wandering Nun" was a strong favourite for that prize, and, as far as Grafton could learn, was not only excessively well, but had undergone a most satis-

factory preparation for the struggle on the town moor. The mare, although it was what is called the mares' month, was not a favourite with the general public; they could not forget her defeat in the Oaks, or understand her miserable display at Ascot. But amongst the shrewdest men on the turf she was a strong fancy, and there were very few of them who did not back the "Wandering Nun" for the St. Leger. Grafton himself was in this category, and had taken a pretty little bet about the mare at Goodwood.

However, putting his racing cares on one side, Bob Grafton strolled on through Tunnleton until he arrived at the Molecombes' house. Yes, Mrs. Molecombe was at home, and he was shown into the drawing-room, where he found Edith and her mother, and, the first greetings over, at once proceeded to read them Bessie's letter.

"How very terrible for Mrs. Enderby!" said the banker's wife, as Bob Grafton concluded. "If he is a hero, I declare I think she is a heroine. Fancy her—poor thing! she has no sooner cured her husband than she is left alone in the midst of all that bustle and turmoil to take care of herself."

"It is rather rough," said Grafton; "but I don't see how Maurice could help it."

"Of course he couldn't, and, though we all wronged him, and told horrible stories about him here—I was as bad as anybody—he has made us feel mean enough now. As for Bessie, it *is* hard upon her," said Edith, passionately; "but what woman, worth the name of one, would not wish to be within reach of her husband when she knew he was carrying his life in his hand!"

Grafton gazed at the girl with no little admiration as she spoke. "By Jove!" he thought, "how her face lights up when she

is moved, she looks quite handsome at this moment." "Yes," he replied, "that's all very well, but it was a mistake Mrs. Enderby's going out. It was no use attempting to persuade her to stay here—go she would; and all one could do was to make things as smooth as possible."

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Grafton; I think it is more than likely she saved her husband's life."

"I grant you that her nursing perhaps contributed a good deal to his recovery, but I have no doubt Maurice wishes now that she was safe in Tunnleton. A man goes campaigning with a lighter heart when he knows those dear to him are safely harboured."

"Had I been in Mrs. Enderby's place, I should have done as Mrs. Enderby has done," replied Edith, defiantly.

"Which by no means follows you would

have done what Mr. Enderby wished you," replied Bob, laughing.

"You're too bad, Mr. Grafton, and I'll argue with you no more. How much longer do you remain at Bridge Court?"

"Only a few days, and then I go north to attend the Doncaster meeting."

"How I envy you!" exclaimed Edith. "How I did enjoy those two days at Ascot, and I am sure you would have too, mamma, if you had only been there."

"Rather too tiring work for me, my dear, I should say from your description of it," rejoined Mrs. Molecombe.

"And what do you think about the Leger, Mr. Grafton?" inquired Edith. "My very limited stock of knowledge concerning racing has almost evaporated since Ascot; but I do know that the Leger is the big race of the Doncaster Meeting."

"Ah! I hope we are not going to have

such a terrible time as we had in June. I have trusted our old friend 'The Wandering Nun' with my venture, and expect to see her turn out a very different mare from what she was at Ascot."

"Ah! how nice it would be if the Enderbys were only safe back from the Cape, and we were all going up to Yorkshire to see Bessie's mare win. It makes me sad to think about it," sighed Edith.

"And when Miss Molecombe takes to such wild castle-building as that, I feel it is time for me to go; besides, I have told you all my news."

"But we shall see you again before you leave Bridge Court?" said Edith, as she rose to say good-bye.

"Yes, most likely," replied Grafton. "Certainly, should I hear any more of Maurice, though that is hardly probable." And then Bob took his departure.

He had just reached the garden-gate when he heard his name called two or three times. Turning towards the direction from which the voice came, he saw Miss Molecombe, who had slipped out of one of the drawing-room windows, hurrying to meet him. "Mr. Grafton," she exclaimed, "one word before you go. I really can't help it. You see it's Bessie's mare, and it's only once in a way, you know, and I must have five pounds on it for the Leger. Will you do it for me?"

"Certainly," he replied, laughing. "John Madingley has much to answer for. His 'Wandering Nun' seems to have turned all your heads, and developed the spirit of gambling wherever it was latent. Maurice first, and now you, Miss Molecombe. However, I will do your bidding at once, and do think this time we shall be victorious."

"Thank you so much," replied Edith, and, with a quick little nod of "good-bye,"

she turned and walked back towards the house.

"She's a rather nice girl that," remarked Grafton to himself, as he trudged homewards, "and I've no doubt old Molecombe can give her a very tidy bit of money if he likes. What an escape she had from that precious scoundrel Dick Madingley, if indeed that be his name." And, singular enough, before he had gone another half-mile that point was destined to be cleared up for him. As he passed the Tunnleton Club General Shrewster was just coming out.

"By Jove, Grafton!" he said, "have you heard the news? There's one of the cleverest turf frauds you ever heard of just come to light. A gang of fellows representing themselves to be betting agents have got hold of a French lady of title, and have swindled her out of close upon thirty thousand pounds. They've all two or three aliases, and

amongst them is one who for some time has passed under the *sobriquet* of Richard Madingley. Go in and buy an evening paper as you pass the station, and you'll see a brief summary of it, but to-morrow morning we shall doubtless read a lengthy account of it."

Grafton followed the general's advice, and saw just enough to whet his curiosity.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LEGER.

When Grafton opened his paper the next morning it was to read one of those astounding stories which exemplify the boundless credulity of human nature in the pursuit of wealth. A plausible set of adventurers, under the names of Bulow, Crofton, & Co, had, by specious and persistent advertising, seduced, doubtless, numberless minnows into their net, but they had at last hooked a big fish, and this

latter, in its agonies, promised to prove too much for its captors. Messrs. Bulow, Crofton, & Co. continually asserted in the journals that they were in possession of such extensive and valuable information as made winning on the turf an absolute certainty. They advertised more largely in the foreign papers than in the English, and at length attracted the attention of the Comtesse de Mombel, an elderly French lady with a passion for speculation. It did not occur to the Comtesse that, under such circumstances, Messrs. Bulow and Crofton would probably work the gold-mine they had discovered without calling in the general public to help them. She appeared to have blindly trusted these adventurers, of whom she knew nothing, and it was not till she had been actually mulcted of thirty thousand pounds that she blenched, and confided the story of her losses to an old

and trusted friend. He, being a man of the world, immediately put himself in communication with the French police; but Messrs. Bulow and Crofton were no 'prentice hands, and had for some time anticipated some such result as certain to follow the plucking of the plumpest pigeon they had ever had in their nets. They got wind of that the authorities were on their track, and at once transferred themselves across the Channel, where their partners were doing the best they could with the British public. It seemed incredible how the Comtesse could have been duped to the extent she had, how she could have been persuaded to lose sum after sum, but the old lady was a thorough gambler at heart, and knew what it was to fight the bank at Monaco; she was, however, vengeful in her wrath, and, like a shrieking Mænad, now that her eyes were opened to the way in

which she had been defrauded. She had money still left, and did not mind spending some of it to bring those who had robbed her to justice. She hounded on the French police, and they in their turn roused Scotland Yard. Messrs. Bulow, Crofton, & Co. found the pursuit grew hot; they separated and dispersed all over England; but the sleuth-hounds of the law were on their trail; one by one they were apprehended, and were utterly astounded, when brought before the magistrate, to find how exceedingly well their biographies were known at Scotland Yard. They mostly rejoiced in aliases, and amongst them figured French, alias Jackson, alias Madingley, alias Bushman.

"Well," said Grafton to himself, as he threw down the paper, "I have never thought much of Mr. Richard Madingley, as he chose to call himself, looking upon him as one of the outside ring; but I certainly

should never have given him credit for being capable of such a gigantic fraud as this. However, the evidence so far goes to show that he was quite one of the minor actors in the drama; but I should think the whole lot are certain to be committed for trial."

That the case excited extraordinary interest in Tunnleton it is needless to say; and to many there it was a source of considerable annoyance. Nobody, perhaps, felt it more than the unfortunate Molecombes, who were conscious of how narrowly they had escaped connection with one of the criminals. How narrowly Edith only knew, and she grew hot with shame to think that her name had ever been coupled with such an one as Dick Madingley.

The papers all remarked on the plausible manners of the prisoners, and pointed out that they seemed to be of superior education.

Still Edith felt that, though she really had only been imposed upon like many other people in Tunnleton, yet she could not go about while Richard Madingley's name was upon everybody's lips.

Although Bob Grafton was again in Tunnleton before his departure for the north, he abstained from calling on the Molecombes. He felt that the whole of this exposure must be very annoying to Edith, and that to meet one who, like himself, was so thoroughly conversant with all the ins and outs of Mr. Richard Madingley's career would be only painful. He contented himself with a brief note, in which he informed her that he had obtained twenty pounds to five for her about the "Wandering Nun" for the Leger. It was a point more than the odds, for they had grown very short of late; but man is weak, and, when the commission is given him by a young and good.

looking woman, is sure to return a liberal price. Then Bob Grafton started for Yorkshire. He heard lots of South African gossip as he went through London. How Ulundi had been fought, and how Thesiger had promptly washed his hands of the whole business, this victory having been vouchsafed him; how there were many tangled skeins yet to unravel; and how the South African business generally promised to keep our people employed for some time to come.

He went to the War Office to try if he could hear anything of Maurice, but, Enderby being only a volunteer, they could give no accurate information concerning him. Then Grafton bethought himself of the "Heliograph" office, and there they told him that their valued correspondent was quite himself again, and once more on his way to the front.

But all this amounted to little more than Mrs. Enderby's letter had told him, so

Grafton, as he had promised, dropped General Shrewster a line to say that he could gather no further tidings of Maurice in London.

When Grafton reached Doncaster he found the Tykes in all the simmer of excitement that the Leger always produces in that somnolent little town. It wakes from its slumbers for but this one week in the year, and then, from the Salutation to the Shakespeare siding, the assembled crowd eat, drink, and talk horse both day and night. Bed must be a mockery to many enthusiasts. What with watching the doings at the rooms overnight; what with watching the morning gallops, attending the sale-ring before lunch, and spending the afternoon on the town moor, from the Monday till the big race is over, the votaries of the turf know but little rest.

The Yorkshiremen were all agog about

"The Wandering Nun." She was a mare trained in their own county, and they vowed she looked fit to run for her life. She became a hotter favourite every hour. All Yorkshire bets, from the Lord Lieutenant of the county to the porters of the Shakespeare siding, and all Yorkshire was throwing in its lot with John Madingley's mare.

There was a hum of applause as the mare walked down the course preparatory to her preliminary canter, and Grafton, who had seen her in all her races, was fain to admit he had never seen her in such condition before. Her coat shone like satin, and she paced up the course quite cool and collected, looking proudly around as if to challenge any competitor to try conclusions with her to-day, while the winner of the Derby, who was also backed for a large sum, was fretful, uneasy, and lathered freely.

"If ever I saw a winner, that's one!"

muttered Grafton. "I think, Miss Molecombe, you and I are going to win our money this time."

"I'll tak' anyone's three croons to two the mare wins," shouted a burly farmer within a few yards of him.

As for the story of the race it is soon told. Never was a Leger galloped in which there were fewer vicissitudes—it might be said, none. "The Wandering Nun" got well off, lay over her field the whole way to the Red House Turn, when she came away, and, despite a resolute challenge by the Derby winner half way up the straight, won easily by a couple of lengths.

"It's come off handsomely this time," muttered Bob. "This will square up Maurice; it's bonnets for Miss Molecombe, or she can go for a sealskin if she likes it better; and for myself, well, I shall enjoy the luxury of

betting the ring their own money back at Newmarket."

He strolled into Tattersall's ring in the course of the afternoon, when he fell across Hampton.

"Well, Mr. Grafton," exclaimed the bookmaker, with a beaming face, "you've had a good race of it no doubt."

"Very fair in my little way," replied Bob, "and you?"

"A rare good 'un, sir," replied the bookmaker; "I was sure the summer form was all wrong, and I took all the long shots about 'The Wandering Nun' I could lay my hands on after she was beat at Ascot, and covered my money, by laying it back at the short odds they have been taking this week. Any horse of Mr. Madingley's, you see, sir, one knew would be run straight, and that mare when she's right is the best of her

year, and she was about as fit to-day as ever I saw one."

"Yes," replied Grafton, "and another good winner on the race you'll be glad to hear of is Mr. Enderby; he is away in South Africa, as no doubt you know, but I've no doubt in the course of the next week or two I shall be able to hand you over the balance of his account."

"Don't talk of that, sir," replied the jubilant bookmaker. "When I read that account in the papers of his ride through all them Kafir fellows I'd have wiped the slate with pleasure. Do me a favour, Mr. Grafton. Just come right away now, and drink his health coupled with 'The Wandering Nun's' in a glass of champagne."

And that afternoon, though he may be destined perhaps never to know it, Maurice

Enderby's health was enthusiastically drunk in the Grand Stand at Doncaster.

It was from General Shrewster Edith first learnt of John Madingley's victory. He had not known much of Miss Molecombe previously, but had become interested in her from the enthusiastic friendship she had developed of late for the Enderbys. Edith had gradually wormed out of Bessie before she left how much she had owed to Maurice's interference, and the girl's gratitude was unbounded. Shrewster had taken a great fancy to her; and, like all men who are choice in their friendships, was all the more prized by those whom they took the trouble to cultivate, and where he pleased there were few men could make themselves more agreeable than could the general. A well-read man, who had lived much of his life in the great London world, of which he had never altogether lost touch, he had plenty

to say about pretty well everything and everybody, and Edith Molecombe never tired of sitting at the feet of Gamaliel.

The general was very pleased when the result of the race became known in Tunnleton. He liked to hear of his old friend winning, and chuckled as he thought of what a stake he would have won over it himself in the old days when he used to bet so heavily. He had given up all that sort of thing now and was never seen upon a race-course, but he still took the greatest interest in the fortunes of his personal friends who still continued their favourite pastime. Meeting Miss Molecombe that afternoon, he told her the news triumphantly, and was astonished at that young lady's clapping her hands and exclaiming,

"I knew she would; I felt she would. Mr. Grafton said 'The Wandering Nun' was sure to win."

"Well," replied the general, laughing, "I think Mr. Grafton is too old a hand to express himself quite so positively, but I suppose you won a lot of money?"

"I won twenty pounds, general," replied Edith; "Mr. Grafton made my bet for me."

"And this after your Ascot experiences? Mark me," continued the general, with mock solemnity, "the turf will be your ruin!"

"Not this time, anyway," rejoined the young lady, as she nodded a merry good-bye and then tripped lightly on her way.

"Ha, principal turf adviser to a young lady! A very comfortable appointment. There's only one thing, Master Bob: remember that racing often leads to match-making, and, by Jove, if it does in your case I shall say you've not done badly on the turf," and, with a smile at his own joke, the general strolled homewards.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BIVOUAC.

On the borderland abutting the Transvaal and the Zulu country are bivouaced a large force, concentrated with the immediate view to the suppression of Sikukuni; clearly time, thinks Sir Garnet, that that defiant and audacious maurauder should be brought to his marrow-bones. While Cetewayo claimed all our attention this chieftain had had things a good deal his own way; he had thrashed the Boers, when they had gone out

against him, and, though we had once worked our way within a mile of his citadel, sickness, drought, and want of provisions had compelled us to fall back, and the enterprising Sikukuni had made that retreat very bitter to us, hanging on the trail of his invaders with the pertinacity of a bull-dog, and making them feel for many a mile on their way back that they had stirred up a hornet's nest. But if settlement with Sikukuni had been postponed the British authorities had by no means forgotten his offending, a pretty accurate record had been kept of his raiding and plundering, and now the time had come to close accounts with him.

Lounging round the bivouac fire, wrapped in all the dreamy enjoyment of the evening pipe, were three men lazily discussing the prospects of the next two or three days,

"Do you think he'll make a stand?" asked Maurice Enderby. "These fellows

can fight, we all know, but Sikukuni must have heard all about the battle of Ulundi by this time, and knows that Cetewayo is a prisoner and the Zulu army a thing of the past."

"You needn't fret yourself on that point," replied a stout, thickset, little officer of the Natal contingent. "I've been up here before, and I'll tell you his citadel is a pretty hard nut to crack. We had a good look at it last time, though we had to retreat without attempting it, but he hung on our skirts for many a mile as we fell back, and made things pretty lively for us. In fact it was a case of desultory fighting for some days. We shall have it of course this time; we've plenty of force and Sir Garnet means it, but it'll be a hottish fight, you may take your oath."

A tramp of horses' hoofs and the jingle of a sabre caused all three men to raise them-

selves on their elbows, and then a dragoon jogged quietly into the fire-light, reined up his horse, and exclaimed in easy nonchalant tones,

"Don't let me disturb you, gentlemen, but perhaps you can tell me where Mr. Enderby, on General W's staff, is spending his evening?"

"Charles Grafton!" exclaimed Maurice, as he sprang to his feet, and rushed eagerly forward to shake hands with the new comer. "What, have all your people got up?"

"Yes, old man, we've pushed along pretty sharp to join you. Our colonel had no idea of a row coming off without our being near it. And, when you've driven the beggars out of their earths, we shall give a very tidy account of them in the open, you'll see. Bless you, you can't think what a lot of 'em us Lancers poked out of the grass after Ulundi."

"Well, we shall be very glad of your help, but you must be dead tired; jump off and we'll do the best we can for you and your horse."

"Can't," replied young Grafton briefly; "I must go back to my own people, who are about half-a-mile away. I only rode on to bring you this letter and a couple of newspapers from Bob, but if you've got anything handy to drink I shall be very glad to wash my mouth out," and, as he spoke, the lancer drew the papers from his sabretasche and handed them to Maurice. "Here's good news for you," he continued, "in Bob's letter, for 'The Wandering Nun' won the Leger, and the papers are full of a wonderful trial which he says will interest you. Thanks," he added, as he took the tumbler Maurice proffered him; "and now I'm off. I shall sleep without rocking as soon as we get littered down;

we've been in the saddle a good many hours to-day. Good-night, gentlemen," and, turning his horse, the lancer disappeared in the gloaming.

Having satisfied his companions' curiosity as to who the newcomer was, and explained that his appearance was the announcement that the—th Lancers had joined the camp, Maurice proceeded to open his letter. This contained an account of the Leger, which Bob described with all the gusto of an enthusiast.

"It will enable you," continued the writer, "to square up comfortably with Hampton. I saw him at Doncaster and told him as much, and he insisted on our having a bottle of champagne to drink your health in, and vowed that, after reading the account of your famous ride from Etshowe, he would willingly cry quits over the whole affair. It was a hot afternoon,

Maurice; he had had a good race and 'wetted' it, in fact he had attained to the acme of geniality. As for your ride, sir, you can't think how it has been talked of. The usual version is, that you charged straight through the whole Zulu army, and people wrangle tremendously about the number that you sabred with your own hand; I only know that Shaw the Life Guardsman sinks into utter insignificance when his holocaust is compared with yours. As for Tunnleton it has adopted you; it claims you as a son; I am not sure there were not thoughts of canonising you; but you really may expect the freedom of the town in a gold box when you return; as for the Reverend Mr. Jarrow, he smiles sweetly and says he made you, and on investigation I found it was not in your military capacity but in your literary one, for that you are war correspondent for the 'Heliograph' has leaked

out, and your spirited letters have taken us all much by surprise. Go on, my boy, and prosper. Bear in mind, my dear Maurice, that you have a wife, and therefore I don't think, in justice to her, you ought to fight the Zulu army again single-handed. Excuse all my rubbish. Good-bye and God bless you. We shall all be delighted to take you by the hand again—the sooner the better.

"Ever yours,

"Bob Grafton.

"Kindest regards to Mrs. Enderby.

"By the way, I send you a couple of papers that I think will interest you. They contain a conclusion of the Richard Madingley romance."

"Ah! they must wait for the morning," muttered Maurice. "I am very glad that I am now able to settle all my liabilities. The sequel of that scamp Madingley's

iniquities I am certainly curious to learn. To think what a fool I allowed him to make of me at Ascot. However, a good sleep is the thing one wants now," and with that Maurice rolled himself in his cloak, and followed the example of his comrades.

The camp was astir betimes the next morning. Every one knew that they were within easy reach of Sikukuni's citadel, and that they would attack that place as soon as they reached it.

Maurice, who found himself an idle man for the present, sat quietly down to read his papers. It was with astonishment that he perused the account of the great De Mombel fraud, as the trial was headed. The extraordinary credulity displayed by the Comtesse made him think less harshly of his own weakness. There is much consolation in finding that we have fellows in our folly.

The police had tracked out the antecedents

of all the prisoners, and they were, without exception, men of good education, and, in the case of two of them, certainly endowed with talents that should have guaranteed them success in any honest calling. But, naturally, the biography that interested Maurice most was that of the *soi disant* Richard Madingley.

He was the son of a well-to-do auctioneer in a country town about four miles from Bingwell, and consequently from a boy had known the whole history of John Madingley. As he grew up, his father associated him with himself in the business, but Dick had already taken to horse-racing and dissolute courses. High words passed between father and son in consequence of the way in which the latter neglected his duties. His inattention, in fact, was seriously affecting the business, and the father soon found that it was hopeless to leave anything to Dick. A

violent quarrel ensued between them at last.

The young man was attending a neighbouring race-meeting when he ought to have been "knocking down lots" in the big room of the George Hotel. The father, a stern, violent man, in his wrath told Dick that he might get his living how and where he pleased, but that he would maintain him no longer in idleness. Dick had a bit of his father's wayward temper, and left Beckington the next day, and, wishing to sever all connection with that place—for which he had good and sufficient reasons of his own—determined to change his name. While he was about it he resolved to do it handsomely, and it occurred to him that he could not do better than assume the name of Madingley. It was, the young man thought, a good travelling title. He knew that John Madingley rarely set foot upon a race-course,

and that if he passed himself off as a distant relation of his he was not likely to meet with exposure.

The police had traced Dick French's career with marvellous accuracy. They had followed him through various situations, in all of which he would have done well could he have made up his mind to stick to his work; but, just as he had lost the capital berth of superintendent of the Bristol restaurant, from perpetually requesting leave to absent himself from his duties, so had been the case in all his other employments. There had never been anything against him, and it was not till he had left the Bristol that he had avowedly taken to the turf, though that had been the chief cause in reality of his so constantly absenting himself from his employment.

But Maurice had no time to read more, for the cavalry trumpets were sounding "boot

and saddle," and the "assembly" was ringing through the infantry camp. The hive was all astir, and about to move forward on most malevolent intentions, bent upon stinging to death Sikukuni and all his hoard.

Maurice called for his horse, and had just mounted, when Charlie Grafton cantered up.

"The game's about to begin," he cried, "and what a morning we've got for it. We're off at once, to cover your advance. Our vedettes report that they touched the enemy's outposts all night. He's all there, and means business. What did you think of the trial? It killed a dull day or two for us, I can tell you, on our way down, and Bob says that you and he know something of this French."

"Yes," rejoined Maurice, "we know a good deal about him, which I'll tell you when we've time. It's too long a story to enter upon just now."

"Yes," laughed the other; "we have no time for yarning just now; I only cantered over just to look at you by daylight before we started—the work will be warm from all I hear."

"I fancy so," replied Maurice; and the two rode away in opposite directions.

It was a pretty sight—the advance that clear autumn morning—the cavalry scouring those big rolling plains far in advance, diverging here and there on either flank to make good bits of bush, or to peer round the kopjes which occasionally cropped up. The enemy's skirmishers could be seen falling back and firing before the steady advance of our own people. At last they reach the mouth of the defile, which led immediately to Sikukuni's stronghold, and now the cavalry were promptly called in. In that broken ground which had now to be traversed, commanded by those quaint masses of rock

and boulders, called in the language of the country kopjes, there was no opportunity for the horsemen, and the infantry skirmishers now spread out in a cloud in their stead. They were no sooner well into the defile than that the enemy meant a stubborn resistance became a fact past all doubt. Every one of these singular hills, running many of them to some hundred feet in height, were crowned with the enemy, who kept up a sharp fire on the advancing column, and only yielded their position upon being fairly turned out by our skirmishers.

Steadily and persistently the force wound its way through the defile, but the advance was slower than had been anticipated. The enemy's fixed determination was beyond all praise. Not only did they fight every kopje, but they disputed every boulder. Science, and even perhaps numbers, were

against them; but on the other hand the country gave them great natural advantages for defence, and they availed themselves of it as dexterously as if led by a skilled European. Stubbornly they resisted, unflinchingly they fought, for every quarter of a mile of that defile; but the Anglo-Saxon won his way at last, and emerged within sight of Sikukuni's citadel. Anxiously the military chiefs bent their field-glasses on this famous stronghold, and there could be no doubt that, should the resistance be as stubborn as that through the pass which they had just fought their way through, they had a tolerably stiff job before them.

Something like a mile of open plain now intervened between them and the place they had come to capture, dotted by the skirmishers, already half a mile ahead, and now the guns, which had done good service in forcing the passage, emerged from the defile,

and galloped sharply to the front, unlimbered, and began to shell the fortress. It consisted of a rocky hill some seven or eight hundred feet high, honeycombed with caves, and artificially terraced all the way up. At the base of the mountain lay the kraal or town, consisting of numberless groups of wattled screen huts, surmounted in many instances by palisading and stone walls. From behind each group of huts a direct or enfilade fire could be poured on the attacking party, while the huts themselves were thoroughly commanded by the rocks above. The whole town was encompassed by an impenetrable hedge of prickly pear, the single entrance to which was barricaded with timber, and led through a mixed avenue of prickly pear and cactus. A very ugly place indeed to get into for an enemy without artillery, but that certainly considerably curtailed its natural defences, for it was quite possible to shell

the defenders out of their kraal before delivering the attack. Nevertheless, the caves, the bush-clothed crags, and the rocky terraces, gave promises of furnishing a toughish job to the invader.

"Well, Mr. Enderby," said the general, after a steady look at it, "I mean having it and Sikukuni himself to boot; but it will cost us dear if these fellows fight, as we've every reason to suppose they will. Just ride forward, tell Colonel Rumford he is making capital practice, and that I want that kraal cleared before I slip the infantry. I wish to goodness I knew whether those fellows can retreat down the back of their mountain, but I suppose there is no doubt they can."

Maurice set spurs to his horse, and cantered gaily off to where Colonel Rumford's guns, with perfect accuracy, were dropping shell after shell into the town; but as he

remarked upon receiving the general's message:

"Tell the chief, sir, I'm not producing so much effect as I expected. The town is evidently occupied by nothing but their warriors, and even they, I can't help fancying, don't hold it in any force. My men have got the range exactly, and, though I've already knocked down some half-score of their huts, yet the result has been the disturbance of very few of them. Now and again a shell makes a few of them shift their quarters, but I can't think there are many of them there."

"I will tell the general what you say, sir," replied Maurice, as he touched his cap, and, turning his horse sharply round, he galloped back to his chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STORMING OF THE KRAAL.

Before Maurice had regained the general's staff the infantry were advancing steadily across the plain towards the kraal. Sikukuni's people made no sign, that is, in the town that lay at the foot of the mountain; still, it was evidently not deserted, for, as Colonel Rumford had said, his shells every now and then unearthed a few of them, and sent them scampering elsewhere for shelter; but on the rocky terraces above the enemy

showed themselves freely, and were evidently prepared for resistance. Steadily the troops advanced, the guns playing over their heads, but without much apparent effect, although shell after shell was pitched into the kraal, upon which all eyes were riveted. The attacking party had now got within some couple of hundred yards, when suddenly the quick eye of the officer who was leading the stormers caught the gleam of steel from behind that hedge of prickly pear.

"Lie down!" he thundered; and the bugler at his side sounded the order—sounding, poor lad, his own *requiem* as he did so—for as the storming party dropped in obedience to his command a volley of musketry swept over them, which, however, claimed but one victim as its result.

"Axes to the front!" cried their leader; "now then, my lads, up and at them before they have time to load again. Hold your

fire till you are up to the hedge. Forward! Charge!" and waving his sword he dashed forward at a steady run.

The Kafirs had by no means abandoned the town, but were formed up behind the hedge, which now became the scene of a desperate hand-to-hand struggle. Several of the men had been armed with axes, with a view to hewing their way through the barrier, and succeeded in making a gap which they soon enlarged sufficiently to enable the greater part of their companies to force their way through.

Still, inside, the garrison made a most stubborn resistance, but the supports were promptly hurried up, and after a quarter of an hour's fierce fighting the kraal was in the hands of the English; the enemy retreating up the mountain. The battle had now begun in earnest; large gaps were speedily opened through the pear and cactus

hedge. The infantry were poured rapidly into the place, only to find themselves under a heavy fire from the terraces immediately above them. No time was lost, and speedily the victors were swarming up the mountain in pursuit of their obstinate foe. When they gained the first terrace, which they did with considerable loss, it was only to encounter as obstinate a resistance as they had done down below; and it was clear that the storming of these successive terraces, enfiladed as they were in many instances by caves, the whereabouts of which were unknown to the assailants, was a very tough business. The general's aides rode fast and far that day, for he rapidly recognised the exceptional strength of the position, and foresaw, if he meant to make, to use a homely phrase, "a good job of it," it would be necessary to employ all his infantry.

Slowly, but steadily, the British won their way up the mountain, though every terrace was desperately contested. The sun was now high in the heavens, and the troops had been, more or less, engaged since early morning, but the general saw now that it was a question of a short time only. The defence began to wax somewhat weaker. You cannot drive a foe before you for hours without more or less demoralising him, and the last terrace taken had not been defended to the bitter end as the previous ones had been.

"Mr. Enderby," exclaimed the general, "ride down to Major Carlton and tell him to take his lancers round the mountain so as to cut off the enemy if he endeavours to escape on the other side, and then make your way up yonder," and he pointed to the mountain, "and bring me back word what they think of things in front. It looks to

me as if we had pretty well taken the fight out of them."

Maurice rode off with his orders. "The general's right," he muttered, "the heart is about taken out of them now, and if the lancers are to cut off their retreat they'll have to look sharp."

He gave his message to Major Carlton, and then lingered to exchange a few words with Charlie Grafton.

"So you've brought us our orders to chip in again, we've had nothing to do but look on lately."

"No, the infantry have had toughish work driving those fellows up the mountain, and the general wants you fellows to catch them when they come down the other side; and now I'm off; my orders are to go and see how they are getting on up there."

"And we're off too," replied Charlie. "I think we shall have made a pretty clean

business of it before another couple of hours are over, if we only find galloping ground when we get round by the hill."

Maurice nodded good-bye, and then pushed rapidly on to the kraal. He entered through one of the gaps that had been hewn in the prickly thorn hedge, dismounted, and giving his horse in charge to some of the ambulance people, who were busy amongst the huts, commenced the ascent of the mountain. The spattering rifle fire was going on above him as the skirmishers pushed forward from rock to rock, preparatory to storming the last terrace but one. Ere Maurice could reach them he heard the cheer which told that they had closed in, and heralded the final rush; he pushed on as rapidly as he could, but they were a good bit above him, and though he gained rapidly upon them the yells and shouts told him they were already

at close quarters, and he knew that the struggle would be most likely over before he got up. It turned out as he expected, and when he arrived the assailants were in full possession of the terrace, and pausing for a few minutes previous to attacking the last one.

"What, it's you in command, Maitland!" he exclaimed, as he exchanged hand-grips with the sturdy Highlander who was in command of the party.

"Yes," he answered, glancing down at the crimsoned blade of his claymore, "these fellows have fought like wild cats, and it has cost us dear. But it is about over now, we've only that one more terrace to carry and they don't mean making much of a stand there; see, there's lots of them going over the crest of the hill now. Now, my lads, spread out in skirmishing order, and push on as before. Sound the advance, bugler;"

and again the Highlanders pushed on, using their rifles but little this time, and being met by only a spattering desultory fire from the final terrace. The short space of ground was quickly skirmished over; the bugle sounded the close, and Maitland with a cheer led his men in their rush. The fighting on this terrace was all over in two or three minutes; a handful of the Kafirs perished grimly in their obstinacy sooner than yield to the invader; and it was now obvious that the whole of Sikukuni's stronghold was in the hands of the English, his tribes scattered and dispersed over the crest of the hill.

"A very pretty eye this same Sikukuni had for a military position," said Maitland. "It's been a rare tough nut to crack, and, if the artillery had not dispersed them a good deal in the kraal, it would have cost us still more lives than it has."

"Yes," replied Maurice, as he stepped along the terrace; unluckily, a cave to his right attracted his attention and he advanced a few steps towards it. Suddenly four or five rifles were discharged from its interior, and with a stifled cry Maurice fell to the ground.

There was a rush of soldiers to the cave; a tumult mixed with shrill cries and savage execrations, and then all was still; and in another couple of minutes half-a-dozen grim veterans issued from its mouth and quietly wiped their blood-stained bayonets. Maitland had sprung forward in the meanwhile and raised Maurice. The wounded man was deadly pale, and a slight froth was oozing from his lips.

"He's badly hit, sir, I'm thinking," said a bluff corporal to his officer, as he assisted him to place Maurice in what they deemed an easy position.

"Yes," rejoined Maitland; "away with you, Donald, and hurry up the doctor as quickly as you can. We must get him down this confounded place as soon as we can, but the surgeon had better see him first."

The corporal dashed down to the terrace below him, where he soon found the surgeon busy in the exercise of his duties. The doctor responded promptly to the summons; quick as thought he was on his knees and tearing open the patrol jacket, cut away the shirt, and gazed anxiously into the two small wounds from which the blood was slowly oozing.

"That's nothing," he said, pointing to the upper one; "but there's trouble in this! of what nature it is difficult to say, till I've used the probe; but it must have hit some of the vital organs. We must get him down of course, but if you're a friend of his,

Maitland, it's no use disguising from you that it's a bad case."

"I've not known him very long," replied the other, "but he's a right good fellow. It's Enderby, the man who did the famous ride from Etshowe, you know. I can't stay any longer, for I must scour the crest of the hill with my skirmishers. He is not in immediate danger, is he?"

"No," replied the doctor; "he is recovering now from the first shock, and curiously enough it's more that upper wound than the lower which has stretched him senseless. He'll soon come to when I administer him a stimulant.

Maitland had time for no more. "Forward, my lads," he exclaimed, and very soon he and his Highlanders had crowned the crest of the hill from whence they could descry their broken foe, retreating pell mell down the narrow and precipitate road that

led to the plain on the other side. A stretcher party meanwhile bore Maurice down to the kraal. A temporary hospital was established there, and, after a table-spoonful or so of brandy had been forced down his throat, he opened his eyes, and began slowly so recover his senses.

"Don't talk—don't try to talk. You are badly hit, but we've given these Kafirs an awful dusting. What I want you to do is to lie as still as you can. Anything you want just whisper to me as shortly as you possibly can."

Maurice nodded assent, and then, in tones barely above a whisper, murmured,

"Charlie Grafton."

"I know," replied the surgeon. "He's in the —th Lancers. He shall be sent for at once, and no doubt will turn up as soon as he can."

"Done, doctor, eh?" whispered Maurice, interrogatively.

"Pooh! Mr. Enderby," rejoined the surgeon. "Knocked out of time for the present, but we shall patch you up, and you'll live to drink many a bumper in commemoration of this day's victory. Now swallow this. I want you to sleep and keep as quiet as you can till we get you to the waggons"

"All right, doctor!" murmured Maurice, with a faint smile. "I'll do my best, but my time has come. Poor Bessie!" and, having swallowed the potion the doctor proffered, he fell quietly back on the stretcher, and seemed to sleep.

Far away in the open plains at the back of the mountain the Lancers rode hot and fiercely on the track of the flying enemy, but their defeat was thorough, and the demoralised Kafirs made not the slightest attempt to stand; whether the famous robber chief-

tain had fallen or not in the day's battle, Major Carlton knew not, when he recalled his squadrons, their lances red with carnage. That Sikukuni was not his prisoner was all he could say positively on that point. Slowly the wearied Lancers jogged back towards the camp, which was already formed in the plain fronting the mountain which had been the object of such fierce contention during the day, and they had hardly arrived there before a messenger from the general made his appearance, with an intimation that he wished a report sent to him at once of what they had done on the other side of the hill. The messenger further brought a note for Lieutenant Grafton, which briefly informed him that Maurice Enderby was badly wounded and anxious to see him, "so badly," added the writer, "that there is not very much time to be lost."

Charlie was much distressed at the intelli-

gence, and went at once to his commanding officer, for leave to ride across to head-quarters, as soon as they had got the men camped down for the night.

"All right, Grafton," replied the Major, "I've got to send one of you with this report of our day's doings to the general. He will probably ask you a few questions about what we did. Poor Enderby! I hope you will not find him quite so bad as you expect. Most promising young fellow that, and I should like to have had him one of us."

Grafton touched his cap and without further word started on his errand. He had not seen much of Maurice, it was true, but there are circumstances under which a strong friendship springs up in a few hours such as might take months in the ordinary course of things. The light-hearted dragoon had taken a strange fancy to Maurice from the first, and it must be remembered that he had

heard a great deal of Enderby from his brother, and then there was no manner of doubt that Maurice's sabre had saved his life on the occasion of the night attack outside Etshowe.

"There can be no hope," he thought; "poor fellow! he must have got his death-wound I suppose—the doctor would hardly have said 'no time to be lost' unless it had been pretty well all over." He made his way in the first place to the general's tent and gave his report.

"I had some hopes, Mr. Grafton, you might have brought me word that you had captured Sikukuni himself; the prisoners say he was commanding in person, but I am afraid now he has escaped us. However I am glad to hear that the casualties in your corps are slight," and a nod of farewell told Grafton that he was dismissed, and now he was free to go and see Enderby. He soon

found the tent to which he had been carried. One of his brother aides-de-camps was watching by the bedside and rose as Charlie entered.

"Mr. Grafton, I presume. I am very glad you have come for he is very anxious to see you."

"Is it so very bad a business?" asked the lancer in a low tone, though not so low but what it caught the quick ears of the wounded man.

"Come here, Charlie," he said, "yes, I am going surely if slowly. The doctor owned as much when he was here some half-hour ago, and I can feel myself that it is so. I am not afraid to die, but when I think of my wife and child I am not sure that I had any business out here at all. Poor Bessie! she has come so far, and even now will be denied the satisfaction of receiving my farewell kiss. I don't know. I got a false start

somehow to begin with, and then I began to go wrong, and was afraid to trust myself amidst all the racing. The work out here kept me straight, you see."

"Yes," interrupted Grafton, as he clasped the dying man's hand, "we all know how well you've done your work too, and are proud of you."

A smile came over Maurice's face at the praise of his young comrade, and he whispered,

"Give me some more of that stuff to drink. I have one favour to ask of you; I know it's granted already if within your power."

"You're letting him talk too much," said the quiet voice of the doctor, who had glided noiselessly to the bedside.

"It makes very little difference, doctor," rejoined Maurice; "a few hours more of life are of little consequence. I am ready

to go, as it must be so, as soon as I have said what I want to Grafton. Listen, Charlie: I should think our work here was finished up to-day, and that fighting, at all events, is over for the present. I want you to go down to Marietzburg and take my last message to my wife. Tell her how I died, and that my last thought was of her. I made a will before I left England, and your brother is my executor and knows all about everything. If you can get leave you will do this for me, won't you, and see poor Bessie off to England as well? If I struck a good blow for you that night by Etshowe you'll not fail me now."

"I promise you solemnly to do your bidding, Maurice," replied Charlie, as he pressed the dying man's hand.

"Good-bye! Good-bye, doctor! I am choking! It was all a false start!" Then came a paroxysm of coughing, the blood

gushed from his lips, one or two convulsive shivers of the strong frame, and Maurice Enderby's course was run.

"He was shot through the lungs," said the doctor, as he reverently closed the eyes, "and the internal hemorrhage has choked and killed him."

CONCLUSION.

They laid poor Maurice to rest, with many of his gallant comrades, at the foot of that rocky stronghold which had been the scene of such desperate fighting. Maitland, Charlie Grafton, the surgeon, and some half-dozen others heard the last few prayers read over him, and then they left him to his last sleep in the wild, far-away land to which his fate had driven him.

As the dead man had foreseen, this victory finished up the war in that part of Zululand, and Charlie found but little difficulty in

obtaining a month's leave, and then, with a sorrowful heart, he started on his journey to Marietzburg.

"Poor Maurice!" he muttered; "I am bound to do his bidding, but pegging one's way up that hill the other day would have been child's play compared to this. How I am to tell the poor little soul that she'll never see her husband again I'm sure I don't know. It's pretty bad when one has to break trouble to a pal, but it is nothing to this!"

As far as the lancer's experience on this point went, the breaking to one of his brother-officers that he had smashed the pipe or lamed the horse he had borrowed was about as much as he could speak to, but ill news travels apace, and, some days before Charlie Grafton saw her, Bessie had heard of the capture of Sikukuni's stronghold and knew of the price it had cost her.

She was stunned by the blow in the first place, but it is astonishing how these soft, pliable women steel themselves to bear trouble when it comes, and, the first shock over, Bessie looked her great trouble steadily in the face. There was no more for her to do in this country; she was alone in the world once more; no, not quite; there was her child, and she must get back to it as quickly as might be. She had no idea how she was left with regard to worldly goods; she knew that Maurice had done the best he could for her before he left England, and that Mr. Grafton knew all about it. She would wait a little longer on the miserable chance that the news of Maurice's death might not be true; but she had little hope; she knew how rarely it was that these sinister rumours were contradicted; a supplementary return of killed and wounded was far more common than a slight error

with regard to the original list; still, she was there, and whilst a glimmer of hope was left she was bound to wait. It was too hard! She had come so far. She had nursed him back to life once, and yet she was destined to be far away from him when he died, not fated to have the sad satisfaction of hearing his farewell and receiving his last kiss. She was seated at the window looking out over those rolling plains across which, but a few weeks back, she had cantered so blithely with Maurice. She was musing over her short married life and thinking how, despite its troubles, what a happy time it had been to her. The tears welled to her eyes as she thought sadly of her present desolation, when the door suddenly opened and a servant announced, "Mr. Grafton."

She had never as yet seen Charlie, but of course had heard much of him from her

husband, and rose at once to welcome him. She knew his errand, and he saw, both in her face and by her dress, that she did so. It was an immense relief to him and gave him courage to plunge *in medias res* at once.

"You know why I am here, Mrs. Enderby? The terrible tidings have reached you, I can see, though I have ridden both fast and far to break them to you myself."

"Thank you," she replied gently as she sank back in her chair.

"I was with him to the last," continued Charlie, "and have brought you his last farewell, as I promised I would. 'Bid my wife good-bye for me,' he said, 'and tell her my last thought was of her.'"

Bessie's tears flowed fast, and there was a strange huskiness in Grafton's voice as he went on—

"I stood by his grave, Mrs. Enderby, and

saw the dust fall on the stanchest friend I ever had—one who all but gave his life for mine. It was hard; the day was over, the battle won, when poor Maurice, who was in the front as usual, came across four or five Kafirs skulking in a cave. Whether they were scared at finding themselves discovered or what, I don't know; but they all discharged their guns and killed poor Maurice. It may be some slight consolation to you to know that everything was done for him that could be done, and that he was spared much suffering." And here Charlie ceased speaking, and Bessie's sobs alone broke the silence of the apartment.

"Thank you, very much, Mr. Grafton," she said, as soon as she could control her voice. "Leave me by myself, please, for a little, to think it all over. I didn't know till now how fondly I still clung to the hope

that he might still be alive. I shall see you again, of course?"

"Yes, I shall be quite at your disposal for the next few days;" and so saying, Charlie left the room.

After the first few hours Bessie once more recovered herself, and set herself at once to work to make preparations for her departure. She was delayed for some two or three days, in consequence of the necessary arrangements for quitting Marietzburg requiring some little management, and during that time she never tired of hearing Charlie Grafton talk about her lost husband. She heard the story of the ride from Etshowe from a man who had all but witnessed it himself, and Charlie never wearied of descanting on the good qualities of the dead man.

"He could ride, Mrs. Enderby, and there

wasn't a better swordsman in the cavalry brigade."

However, thanks to the lancer's exertions, they were off for Port Durban at last, where, true to his promise, Charlie had determined to see Mrs. Enderby safe on board ship, and she was naturally only too anxious to leave a land in which she had known such bitter sorrow.

The "Kangaroo's" anchor was atrip, the blue peter was flying at the fore, and the hoarse cry of "for shore to the gangway" resounded through her decks.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Enderby," exclaimed Charlie Grafton. "May fair winds and a good voyage be your lot. I have kept it till to-day," he continued, as he placed a small packet in her hand, "but I brought down for you Maurice's watch, rings, and a few trifles of that sort; in fact we kept all we thought you would like to have. His

sword, and a few of the larger things, have been forwarded to my brother; and now I must say good-bye. Remember me to Bob."

"Good-bye, Mr. Grafton; and thank you very much for all the care you have taken of me."

"I have only done the very little I could to pay off the great debt I owed your husband," said Charlie, as he pressed her hand.

"Now then, look alive for shore," roared a hoarse voice behind them, "we shall be moving through the water in another five minutes." Charlie lifted his cap and in another minute was slipping down the gangway into one of the surf-boats that lay along side. A few minutes more, and a flutter of her handkerchief from Bessie as the steamer sped on her homeward voyage, and a wave of his cap from young Grafton as the rowers ploughed steadily back to the

Natal coast, and their adieux were completed.

* * * * *

"Well, general, I've done it," exclaimed Bob Grafton, with an expression of comic despair, as he burst suddenly into the general's sanctuary, regardless of the efforts of the well-trained servitor, who vainly endeavoured to announce him. "I don't want to say a word against poor dear Maurice Enderby, but this is just what comes of ill-regulated young men who go off to the wars, and leave what the Americans would call 'loose children' lying around."

"What on earth do you mean?" said General Shrewster, as in blank astonishment he removed the cigar from his lips.

"Just this," returned Grafton: "when Mrs. Enderby went off all in a hurry to look after her husband, Mrs. Molecombe volunteered to take care of the child till she came

back. Well, you know what a woman is, under those circumstances. She swore-in all her friends to keep an eye on that boy. There was a perfect syndicate of us in the business, and the end of it is ——"

"That two of that syndicate have settled to become one," interposed the general laughing. "My dear Grafton, I heartily congratulate you. I've seen a good deal of Edith Molecombe lately, and she is a monstrous nice, sensible, ladylike girl, and, in a worldly point of view, is a very fair match for any man."

"Oh! it's all right," replied Bob; "don't think I've any misgivings about the matter. The only blessed thing I don't quite understand is, how I came to do it at all; you see I never counted upon 'plunging' in that way."

"I dare say not. I fancy there are a good many fellows who don't make up their

minds till quite the last moment. A hot flirtation is like a good thing to hounds. You take fences you would not look at in cold blood. However, I've nothing but congratulations for you. Have you any news of Mrs. Enderby?"

"Yes; I had a letter from Charlie only the other day, and she may be here any moment. He saw her off from Port Durban and it's a mere question whether the "Kangaroo" or the mail steamer goes the fastest."

"She'll be made a great fuss with here," said Shrewster quietly, "when she does arrive. The feeling about poor Enderby is very strong. Tunnleton is very proud of his exploits in Zululand, and there is an idea that he was dealt rather hardly with about his Tunnleton doings. Poor fellow! I'm afraid my advice had something to say to sending him out to his doom."

"That's nonsense, general," replied Grafton; "as far as that goes, I had also something to say to it. But what was to be done? The man had made a false start in life. He was always fretting in his clerical harness, and the gossip here stung him to madness. Had he been spared, poor fellow, he would have made his mark in his new profession. Charlie's letter is full of his praises, and I fancy the men out there thought very highly of him, and that, had he lived, there would have been very little doubt about his obtaining the commission he desired."

"And when does your brother think of coming home?" asked the general.

"When this cruel war is over, as the song says," laughed Bob. "I've a sort of hazy idea that it never *is* quite over in those parts. They are always on the simmer, like

a *pot au feu*, and boil over at periodical intervals."

As General Shrewster had predicted, Bessie's friends showed strong sympathy for her in her trouble, and the Molecombes insisted upon her making her home with them till, as Edith said, "she had time to look round," and Bessie willingly consented.

"I have," she said, smiling, "some businesss matters to talk over with Mr. Grafton, and I should think there is no place where I am more likely to come across him than here."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Edith demurely, "he *is* here a good deal."

"Besides," continued Bessie, "I shall most probably settle in Tunnleton. I have a great many friends here, and I think can manage with my slender income."

But a letter from John Madingley very

soon removed any fears Mrs. Enderby might entertain regarding ways and means, for Uncle John, who had read of Maurice's exploits with the greatest pride, and who had felt most sincerely grieved at his untimely end, promised at once to make her a suitable allowance and to provide for her at his death.

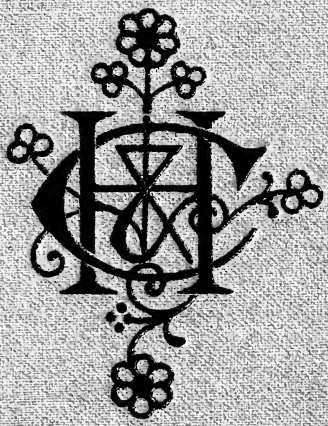
"I don't ask you," he wrote, "to make your home with me, because it would be a dullish life for a girl like you to be buried in the country with an old fogey whose sole visitors are a few other old gentlemen of his own standing, but I hope you'll pay me a visit every summer and stay just as long as it pleases you. Shrewster will tell you that I was only waiting for what, alas! was never to be, namely, to see your poor husband gazetted into the army, to allow him a moderate income, and this, my dear Bessie, will at once be extended to you.

And now, may God bless and comfort you in your sorrow.

"Ever your affectionate Uncle,

"JOHN MADINGLEY."

"It is very kind of him," said Bessie; "everybody is very kind to me. Ah, Maurice, my dear, if you could but have lived to share it all with me!"

THE END.

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